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A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE IDEAS
OF C. WRIGHT MILLS FROM A
SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE
PERSPECTIVE

A thesis
submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through
the Department of Sociology in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at
the University of Windsor

J. Errol Fletcher

July, 1974

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ABSTRACT

Charles Wright Mills, a sociologist, was often considered the leading figure of a social criticism movement in the United States during the Fifties. This movement eventually peaked in the Sixties and gave rise to what is often referred to as the New Left.

This study tries to trace the relationship between the ideals that Mills held for his society and the personal values and sociocultural factors which may have shaped these ideals.

In doing this study, a sociology of knowledge approach was found efficacious because it stresses the social origin of ideas. Mills' major contributions and significant ideas in sociology were systematically examined and made explicit. These ideas were analyzed in relation to personal motivations, and sociocultural factors such as the audience he had, the political and intellectual events of his time, and his biographical data. The data were gathered through library research and communication with people who either knew Mills personally or were knowledgeable about him.

From the available biographical information, it seemed that Mills, from quite early in his life, was

an isolated and lonely individual who felt neglected and thus developed a sense of being different. He later used these conditions to develop a certain self-confidence, a rebellious attitude, and a deep desire for independence. These attitudes led him to be called a radical, and caused him to differ considerably from his academic peers in his perspective of North American society.

Freedom, as a cherished value, grew out of Mills' desire for autonomy in all matters. This led him to a concern with power, reason, and truth. Using his concept of a "vocabulary of motives," his main vocabulary revolved around the concepts of freedom, reason, truth, power, and the place of moral values and motives in society. It was in terms of these that he developed theories of the place of ideologies in society, the social origin of motives, the distribution of power in American society, and the relationship between personal values and public issues. Mills' personal values, then, had a direct influence upon his ideals for American society.

An indirect aspect of this study is the contribution it may make to the role of personality and the process of social change, for Mills, who was considered a radical of his time, had a profound effect on those

forces which tried to bring about changes in the society during the Fifties and Sixties.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Method of Study

This thesis proposes an examination of the major ideas of Charles Wright Mills, an eminent American sociologist (1916-1962), from a sociology of knowledge perspective. The thesis will attempt to isolate some relevant factors in order to understand the relationship between Mills' ideas and unique view of American society and the forces that shaped his vision.

Most of the literature by Mills and relevant material about him will be systematically examined in order to become acquainted with his ideas, his personality, his attitudes, values, milieu, and the individuals, both personal and public, with whom he interacted. The material will be arranged and classified in such a manner as to obtain a biographical, intellectual, and political profile of Mills.

C. Wright Mills was an acclaimed critic of both the American society and the discipline of sociology. He was considered a radical who was not afraid of confrontation nor of saying the unpopular. His blunt, outspoken approach towards academic matters and politics often created resentment and estrangement for

him within these sectors; but it also gained him the deep admiration of a group of young intellectuals and Third World people who saw him as the champion of their causes. Thus, Horowitz commented that,

Indeed, he was in all likelihood the most widely known and best respected American social scientist in Europe, Asia, and especially Latin America. And ironically enough, while the orthodox sociologist wrote of Mills as some sort of intellectual pariah he was widely appreciated and read by all sectors of American social science (Power, Politics, and People, 1963, p. 6).

He was, in fact, often considered the father of the New Left movement,¹ and it is said that no other writer had nearly his influence on the generation that produced the sit-in movement and the Peace Corps (Oglesby, 1969, p. 23). His importance as a social definer can also be inferred from the popularity and healthy sales of his books (White Collar² sold 30,000 copies in its original six dollar edition, and the distribution of Power Elite³ and The Causes of World

1 It is generally felt that he coined the term "New Left," for among his unfinished projects was a book on the intellectuals, proposing to create what he called "The New Left." See Dan Wakefield, "Taking it big: a memoir of C. Wright Mills," Atlantic (September, 1971), p. 71.

2 C.W. Mills, White Collar: The American Middle Classes (New York, 1951).

3 C.W. Mills, The Power Elite (New York, 1956).

War III⁴ reached best-seller proportions), and the fact that his works have been translated into at least seven languages, including Russian.⁵

Although the study generally will be confined to the individual ideas of Mills rather than those of a group, it is by no means limited to a mere imputation of individual psychological motivations for his acts, and therefore should not be labelled psychologism. Rather, it takes into consideration the social processes that took place in the formation of his perspective and concepts, of which the biographical and psychological are inevitable parts.⁶

It is also notable that Mills' ideas did not belong solely to him; because they were sanctioned by a significant number of individuals, it is evident that his intercourse was not personal and private,

⁴ C.W. Mills, The Causes of World War III (New York, 1958).

⁵ See Herbert Aptheker, The World of C. Wright Mills (New York, 1966), p. 8, about book sales.

⁶ Mills, who was himself dedicated to large-scale study, stressed the importance of the relationship between biography and history in the study of sociology; thus he says, "The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relation between the two within society" (Mills, 1959, p. 6). He felt that many personal issues were related to the bigger public and political decisions which affected one's life in industrial society.

but rather a public and largely political one. In many cases--like most good popular writers--Mills was merely able to put into context and define more clearly what a number of others may have vaguely suspected.⁷

The study will not draw on statistical data nor will it purport to prove, refute, or predict anything. It will be mainly an application and demonstration of the sociology of knowledge orientation. It will also try to arrive at some insight into the genesis of Mills' ideas; to see how contingencies and ideas in the social milieu can interact with more intrinsic factors to produce novel concepts. Sometimes the conceptions of prominent men such as Mills carry enough force to make a considerable impact upon society.

Theory

The main thrust of the sociology of knowledge is aimed at the relationship between individuals, the formation of thoughts and ideas, and the group

⁷ See "The Fascinated Readers - Analysis of the Politics Questionnaire," by Ruth Harper Mills, in Politics (Winter, 1948), pp. 59-63. Mills developed the idea for this survey which found that most of the readers were "independent radicals" similar to himself. Many were Mills' friends and acquaintances; they included people like Hans Gerth, Kenneth Stampe, Richard Hofstadter, Frank Friedel, Daniel Bell, and Irving Howe.

and cultural settings in which they arise. The sociology of knowledge as an analytical approach and a conscious, systematic way of examining society seemed to be expedient for this study, since it is concerned with the ideas of an individual who defined for a significant group of people the way that he perceived American society.

A basic premise of the sociology of knowledge is that we cannot truly understand the behaviour of individuals and groups unless we comprehend precisely the interrelationships between mental productions and the existential bases of society. Existential bases include such factors as historical situations, values, culture, and group structures.⁸ Karl Mannheim states that,

...the sociology of knowledge seeks to comprehend thought in the concrete setting of an historical-social situation out of which individually differentiated thought only very gradually emerges. Thus it is not men in general who think, but men in certain groups who have developed a particular style of thought in an endless series of responses to certain typical situations characterizing their common position (Mannheim, 1936, p. 3).

⁸ Robert K. Merton gives a more comprehensive list of what are considered the existential bases of society in Social Theory and Social Structure (New York, 1957), pp. 460-488.

Generally, the sociology of knowledge is associated with Karl Mannheim, who is most responsible for developing the discipline into a theoretical system. Actually, the term Wissensoziologie was first coined by Max Scheler, a German philosopher-sociologist; but its germination is often traced back to Karl Marx, who emphasized the economic factor (a substructure) as the base from which intellectual productions (superstructures) are ultimately developed. Other notable contributors to the sociology of knowledge are: the French school, especially Durkheim's concept of collective representations, the "collective unconscious"; and the American social behaviourists such as John Dewey, William James, and George Herbert Mead.⁹ Mills was also responsible for trying to achieve a synthesis between the American social behaviourists' concept of the development of mind and the earlier French and German concepts.¹⁰ The German schools emphasized the

⁹ For a more thorough analysis of the development of the sociology of knowledge, see J.E. Curtis and J.W. Petras, eds., The Sociology of Knowledge (New York, 1970).

¹⁰ Mills' early works in the discipline include "Language, Logic, and Culture," "Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive," and "Methodological Consequences of the Sociology of Knowledge." See Irving Horowitz, ed., Power, Politics, and People (New York, 1963). Mills felt that the mechanism which links mind and society could be found in the theories of the Americans, while others only acknowledged the connection.

individual's role in relation to historical processes and focused on those general factors that influence groups to move in some particular direction at a particular time. The French stressed the relationship between individual minds and society, while the American behaviourists also emphasized the interdependence between individuals and the sociocultural group.

Traditionally, the sociology of knowledge has had difficulty explaining individual ideas which differ considerably from those of the ascribed group. This is of particular interest in this thesis because Mills, too, was considered a rebel and a man whose ideas diverged from those of his academic peers.

Mannheim touched upon the problem in his discussion of the "intelligentsia."¹¹ The intelligentsia is a relatively classless, unanchored group, though this is not to be misinterpreted to mean they maintain no class and status ties; but a member of the intelligentsia is more likely than the average man, who is born to a particular group, to transcend the Weltanschauung of the group to which he was born.

¹¹ The terminology is associated with Alfred Weber, who called this group the "socially unattached intelligentsia" (freischwebende Intelligenz). See Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia (New York, 1936).

This is made possible by his education, which exposes him to contrary social realities. In Mannheim's words,

This acquired education heritage subjects him to the influence of opposing tendencies in social reality, while the person who is not oriented toward the whole through education, but rather participates directly in the social process of production, merely tends to absorb the Weltanschauung of that particular group and to act exclusively under the influence of the conditions imposed by his immediate social situation (Mannheim, 1936, p. 156).

Mannheim then goes on to describe two directions which intellectuals have taken out of this psychologically uncomfortable middle-of-the-road position:

First what amounts to a largely voluntary affiliation with one or the other of the various antagonistic classes; second, scrutiny of their own social mooring and the quest for fulfilment of their mission as predestined advocates of the intellectual interest of the whole (Mannheim, 1936, p. 158).

In analysing Mills, I will try to use what he refers to as the "sociological imagination," which he claims enables "its possessor to understand a historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and external career of a variety of individuals" (Mills, 1959, p. 5), and allows the individual "the capacity to shift from one perspective to another--from the political to the psychological" (Mills, 1959, p. 7). He goes on to say that the sociological imagination works with the distinction between

the "personal troubles of milieu" and the "public issues of social structure." Troubles were defined as those which occur within the character of the individual and of which he was personally aware, while issues had to do with the organization of many personal milieux into institutional structures. An issue is some cherished public value which is felt to be threatened, and troubles are cherished, but threatened, personal values (Mills, 1959, p. 8).

CHAPTER I

Biographical Orientation

Charles Wright Mills was born on August 28, 1916, to Charles Grover Mills and Francis Ursula Mills, a middle class couple of Irish and English descent. They had one other child, a girl named Ursula, born in 1913. The family lived in Waco, Texas until 1923 but moved later that year when the elder Charles Mills obtained new employment which required much travel and many relocations. The Mills', in fact, lived in eight different towns before young Mills finished high school (Gillam, 1966, p. 15).¹ As a result of his father's travels, much of his early tutelage was left up to his mother.

Apparently these were distressing years for the young Charles, who, it seemed, made friends very slowly. It is suggested that this relatively rootless background may have contributed to the development

¹ Much of the specific and more intimate biographical detail was taken from Richard A. Gillam, who carried out a study of Mills in 1966 entitled The Intellectual As Rebel: C. Wright Mills, 1916-1946 (unpublished M.A. thesis, copies on file at Columbia University Library). Gillam had access to all of Mills' papers and personal files. He also communicated with and interviewed Mills' relatives and friends.

of his sense of isolation from his peers; being thus forced to fall back on his own resources fostered in him an intractable will which was to be characteristic of him throughout his life.

The family's first move was from Waco to Forth Worth, Texas. Apparently Mills was unhappy about leaving friends, and his misery was compounded by taunts and teasing from an older neighbourhood boy. To make matters worse, he was moved back in school and had to attend classes with children younger and smaller than he. At this stage there were incipient manifestations of characteristics which were to become prominent: he rebelled against and rejected his classmates, and refused to attend school despite the desperate efforts of his parents. He was finally promoted and agreed to attend with peers of his own age and size.²

The family moved to Sherman, Texas in 1924, where it seemed the same pattern was repeated. He attended a "convent" and was set back in school again. Here

² See R.A. Gillam, The Intellectual As Rebel, p. 16. It is related that his mother would accompany him to school and leave him there, only to find him home before her. His father stepped in to try to curb his resistance; one day, being taken to school by the elder Mills, Charles wrapped his legs around a telephone pole and steadfastly refused to move. His father was forced to leave him thus.

too he did not fit in with the other children and was tortured by an older boy (Gillam, 1966, p. 17). He again lost interest in school and was absent for a good part of the time. Later, however, he struck up a close friendship with an older boy named Jim Roach, and with a parish priest named Father Allard; during this period his grades began to improve.

In 1928 the young Mills' life was interrupted again when the family moved to Dallas. Gillam considers this one of the worst times in the youngster's life. He was forced to leave his few friends and what had become a relatively contented life in a small community and move to a large and flourishing city of over a quarter million people.³ Once more he lost interest in peers and classes.

It appears that Mills developed a sense of being different quite early and relished his individuality. Gillam, quoting from Mills' biographical notes, wrote that he was "a problem child and much discussed;" Mills knew this and "enjoyed it very much" (Gillam, 1966, p. 22). The evidence also suggests, however, that he may have been somewhat uncomfortable in this

³ Waco had a population of 38,500 in 1920; Sherman had 15,031 people. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fourteenth Census: 1920, 3, p. 989. Dallas' population is recorded in the Fifteenth Census, 1930, 3, p. 972.

role initially, for he manifested a common teenage reaction to insecurity and isolation; he developed an enormous appetite for which he was later well known.⁴ He was seized by convulsions and his illness was diagnosed as incurable by two doctors; but a third, a psychiatrist, predicted correctly that he suffered only from a glandular imbalance and over-eating. Mills overcame this problem soon after (Gillam, 1966, pp. 21-22).

Charles entered Dallas High School in 1930 and during these years developed many new interests; most of these were pursued in isolation, and his individualism was thus further promoted. He was good at carpentry and built his own sailboat; he also became interested in draftsmanship and architecture. He worked the summer of 1931 with a local architect and the following year helped design a new house for his parents (Gillam, 1966, p. 22). The upper floor, which he designed single-handedly, was exclusively for himself, and it became the refuge where he spent hours in isolation, painting, reading, dreaming, and writing.

⁴ See Harvey Swados, "C. Wright Mills: A Personal Memoir," in A Radical At Large (London, 1968), pp. 199-208, for a description of Mills' prodigious appetite.

His seemingly antithetical characteristics, sensitivity, and stubborn individuality here found a natural outlet in the world of books, reflection, and creativity (Gillam, 1966, p. 23).

While at high school, Mills began to show signs of his later self-assurance. Although his grades were still only fair, his father remembered him going through an average-sized book in an evening and retaining most of the facts in a prodigious memory; and that he had been "making notes for his college thesis for some time" (Gillam, 1966, p. 24). When his mother asked him why he did not have the highest grades in his class, he simply answered, "Because I don't want to" (Gillam, 1966, p. 24).

The rebellious attitude which later characterised Mills' theories grew and was expressed in several ways during this early period. He was raised a Catholic but rejected the religion while still in high school, much to the dismay of his parents. Gillam notes that,

He ignored the vigorous protestation of his mother, defied his parents, and quit the Catholic church. Francis Mills was "grieved" but finally accepted the decision since she could get "nowhere fast" by arguing with her son (Gillam, 1966, p. 25).

His mother summed up his rebelliousness by saying to him, "All you wanted was your own way in all things"

(Gillam, 1966, p. 26). Later in college he rebelled in terms of clothing as well, wearing corduroy when no one else did, moccasins even to dinner parties, and a fur hat. Later he reflected on these years as "a conscious set of gestures" aimed at rooting out the inhibiting pretensions and convenient prejudices that seeped into him before he was under his own control (Gillam, 1966, p. 39).⁵

In his senior year in high school, he began to write poetry and to read voraciously. It was as if he achieved another level of awareness. Thus he remarked, "It was as if I suddenly became first awake" (Gillam, 1966, p. 26). From Mills' notes and papers, Gillam gathered that he read such books as Warren Hilton's twelve volumes about the psychology of success; Making Your Own World; Driving Power of Thought; Trained Memory; and Mind Mastery. He also read Clarence Darrow, "An 18th Century Rationalist Tract," and copied out such statements as, "Doubt is the beginning of wisdom, fear of God is the end of wisdom," "Every advantage goes with power," "Most of the good things that have come to man are the results of discovering

⁵ The underlined emphasis is the author's. We will see later that being under his own control was very important to Mills and that this attitude no doubt affected his theories.

facts, of consciously seeking and finding truth" (Gillam, 1966, pp. 26-27). These books may have been pivotal in his life, for he believed strongly in the force of willpower, and had an unwavering faith in reason as a means of achieving freedom for mankind. He also believed deeply in the importance of power in society and the essentiality of discovering facts and finding truth.

According to Gillam, Mills' individualism was probably reinforced in this period, for he gained greater acceptance among his classmates, often impressing them with his intelligence and individuality (Gillam, 1966, p. 27). He graduated from high school in 1934 and went to college at Texas A and M University.

I

In the fall of 1934 Mills began his university studies, majoring in science; it turned out to be a very unpleasant experience for him and another critical point in his life. Mills' rebellious spirit revolted against the severe regimentation and discipline enforced by the school. Perhaps the most distressing incident was the isolation punishment meted out to him by fellow students. It seemed that he needlessly injured an opponent in a wrestling

match, and as a result no one would speak to him. He commented, "I was cut off and alone," and later wrote, "...and I felt it at the time" (Gillam, 1966, p. 31). He swore to his friend Harvey Swados (whether it was an exaggeration or not, we don't know) that he lived for an entire year without being addressed by a single student, nor did he speak to them (Swados, 1967, p. 202).

During his isolation, he turned to a small group of teachers and his books. (Among the books he read were several on philosophy, which remained a central interest in his life and in which he eventually took a Master's degree.) About this time, Mills was also introduced to sociology. He read a textbook about George Herbert Mead and Charles Cooley, and it is in terms of their social psychology that he "first came seriously to begin to analyze himself" (Gillam, 1966, p. 31). Mead is of particular interest in the works of Mills because his pragmatic influence was later to direct much of Mills' intellectual discourse.

Mills' discontent with the school and his isolation were too much to cope with; he left Texas A and M at the end of his first year.

II

Mills enrolled at the University of Texas in

Austin in the fall of 1935. Gillam states,

Here the young student found the intellectual and emotional roots he needed. From a rough-hewed, uncultivated individual uncertain of his own identity, he was transformed into a personally self-confident and intellectually assured college graduate who left Texas with academic honours, a clear sense of his own direction and ideas which would soon bring him to the attention of metropolitan intellectuals far from his home state (Gillam, 1966, p. 36).

It was here that Mills had his first encounter with Marxist thought, through an intimate friend named William Record, a fellow student versed in Marxism. He did not seem to have read Marx thoroughly, however, until several years later, nor did he give the theories full recognition until close to the end of his life (Gillam, 1966, p. 37).

At Texas Mills had another close friend named David Rose, with whom he collaborated in an attempt to produce a great work of American fiction. They wrote several novelettes which were all rejected by publishers. In this, Mills demonstrated what could be an inability then, and always, to accept personal failure and rejection; he kept the rejection slips but steadfastly refused to allow anyone to read the works (Gillam, 1966, p. 38).

The friendship with Rose also demonstrated another characteristic attitude of Mills. In the

beginning Rose was Mills' intellectual superior, and Mills felt uncomfortable and threatened in this position. When he eventually felt that he had overcome this intellectual ascendancy, he reflected on it:

We were walking along in front of the Y.M.C.A. and I was stronger in some argument; whether it's true or not doesn't matter, I felt it (I felt good about the shift) but this meant, again I was alone, or at least very much on my own: my own leader (Gillam, 1966, p. 38).

In this case being his own leader, which no doubt signified a form of freedom to him, was more important than the friendship he shared with Rose.

* The isolation that Mills now suffered took on a new dimension, for he intellectualized it, seeing it as a positive attribute which gave him a kind of freedom, a certain privacy, in which "whatever is unique and original can come out and become more universal" (Gillam, 1966, p. 39).

Mills leaned towards certain professors at Texas, one of whom was Clarence Ayres, a professor of economics who introduced him to the works of Thorstein Veblen. Ayres had been Veblen's assistant at the University of Chicago and had deeply admired him; he passed on this feeling to Mills who was later to be compared in several ways to Veblen. George Gentry, a professor of philosophy, also influenced Mills greatly. Gentry had studied under G.H. Mead, and gave Mills

his first intensive exposure to American pragmatism and to logic. He introduced Mills to the works of Mead, Dewey, Pierce, and James (Gillam, 1966, p. 44). Mills' first published article, "Language, Logic, and Culture," originated from work begun under Gentry.

Mills graduated from the University of Texas in 1939 with a B.A. in sociology, an M.A. in philosophy, a self-confidence he had never known, and a wife whom he had married in his junior year (Gillam, 1966, p. 39).

III

Mills won a teaching assistantship and went to Wisconsin, then a highly prestigious university, for post-graduate study. He was filled with his new-found self-confidence, and a classmate remembered Mills, before he went to Wisconsin, dramatically opening a drawer full of note cards and announcing that he had already researched his dissertation (Gillam, 1966, p. 50).

In the department of sociology, Mills studied under Howard Becker, engaging in some technical work in philosophy and the sociology of knowledge. He was encouraged by Hans Gerth, then an assistant professor of sociology, with who Mills developed a close intellectual relationship; they eventually collaborated on

two books.⁶ From Gerth Mills acquired extensive knowledge of Marx, Mannheim--under whom Gerth had studied--and Weber, all of whom exerted considerable influence on his writings.

Mills graduated from Wisconsin in 1942 and completed three important contributions to the sociology of knowledge while he was there.⁷

IV

Mills was appointed associate professor of sociology at the University of Maryland, where he stayed for four years. During this time he met Kenneth Stamp and Richard Hofstadter, fellow professors who supported his sociological perspectives and were instrumental in his later political outlook.⁸

On December 7, 1942, the United States was plunged

6 Character and Social Structure: The Psychology of Social Institutions (New York, 1953) and Translations From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (New York, 1946).

7 "Methodological Consequences of the Sociology of Knowledge," American Journal of Sociology, XLVI, 3 (November, 1940), pp. 316-330; "Situating Actions and Vocabularies of Motives," American Sociological Review, V, 6 (December, 1940), pp. 904-913; and his doctoral dissertation, A Sociological Account of Pragmatism.

8 R.A. Gillam, op. cit., pp. 69, 85. Here we find discussion between Gillam and Kenneth Stamp regarding the similarity of Hofstadter's and Mills' political views.

into war. This marked another crucial point in his life: it was the war, he later claimed, that made him a political radical (Gillam, 1966, p. 72). He was not a pacifist opposed to all forms of violence:

I cannot feel myself a pacifist--intellectually and morally, I am of course persuaded; but in my hands and in my heart I know that I am not and can't be (Gillam, 1966, p. 77).

However, the only form of violence he felt was justified was a personal one, that is, a personal confrontation where, "up against another man, or maybe even two, it's somewhat up to you who gets killed" (Gillam, 1966, p. 77). His objection to war, then, seemed based on the fact that it was impersonal and out of his control. Gillam comments on this fact:

His objections to modern warfare stemmed from no abstract doctrine of non-violence, but from a feeling that war infringed on his own individual autonomy. He could accept violence as long as it remained fully within his own control (Gillam, 1966, p. 77).

His severe reaction to the war, then, did not originate from mere abstract reasoning, but was a characteristic personal reaction to something he felt was a threat to personal, cherished values.⁹

He had been aware of the move towards war for

⁹ See C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination (New York, 1959), p. 8, for his discussion of "troubles" and "issues" and threatened values.

some time, but did not take a moral stand; he "drifted," he "dangled" (Gillam, 1966, p. 78) until the United States was drawn in, and he was called to be examined (and eventually rejected for reasons of hypertension). Reflecting on the war, Mills wrote that it meant to him "the rural idiocy and militarism of Texas A and M" (Gillam, 1966, p. 71).

In the period at Maryland, Mills busied himself writing several articles and doing a series of research projects. He studied business and political leaders, and for a while was a special business consultant to the Smaller War Plants Corporation, travelling and preparing Senate Committee reports on small business and civic welfare. His theoretical orientation was moving away from social philosophy and towards political writing and empirical research. His research, however, was more or less an application of concepts he dealt with in the sociology of knowledge. His studies on the business and political leaders, for example, tried to pinpoint their backgrounds, ideologies, interests. We will see later that he considered this period as a kind of intellectual muckraking.

After the war ended, Mills received a Guggenheim Fellowship. He had been communicating with

Robert Merton while still a graduate student, and Merton helped him to achieve an appointment at Columbia University in the school's Bureau of Applied Social Research division, which was under the supervision of Paul Lazarsfeld at the time. Mills was later offered an assistant professorship and began teaching at Columbia in the fall of 1946.

Here Mills followed a familiar pattern of isolation. Gillam notes that,

Mills in fact never became part of the academic establishment; in the east as in the west, he remained something of a marginal man, skirting the edges of academia, sometimes joining its inner ranks for a brief moment of solidarity but never knowing that intense fraternity experienced by so many (Gillam, 1966, p. 115).

Mills said of himself, "I've always felt myself to be a sort of outlander in the East and particularly in New York City" (Gillam, 1966, p. 115).

During his years at Columbia, he accomplished an extensive amount of work; he also got married for the second time, to Ruth Harper, in 1947.¹⁰ He studied health needs for the Congress of Industrial Relations in Detroit; personal influence and mass communication effects on Mid-Westerners; migration patterns of Puerto

¹⁰ Details of his first marriage and divorce are sketchy. He married his first wife in his junior year at college; it is not known when they divorced.

Ricans to New York; and published at least eight books and several articles. The latter will be discussed throughout the thesis.

In later years, he held visiting lectureships at the University of Copenhagen, the William White Institute of Psychiatry, Brandeis University, and the United States Air War College. In the late Forties, he also filled in on the social science staff at the University of Chicago for David Reisman (Gillam, 1966, p. 113).

In the early Fifties and Sixties he made several trips abroad. He wanted very much to visit China, but was refused a visa; he therefore jumped at the chance to visit Cuba in the fall of 1960. The result of that trip was Listen Yankee.¹¹ After the massive effort of writing this, which he did in approximately six weeks, he pushed himself to prepare for a debate on U.S. foreign policy in Latin America, with A.A. Berle. He had a heart attack the night before the broadcast. Later, in 1961, he went to Russia and Europe in the hope that a Russian clinic and specialist might help his heart problems, but he found no answers.

¹¹ C.W. Mills, Listen Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba (New York, 1960).

He died shortly after returning from Europe, on the twentieth of March, 1962, at the age of forty-six.

In summarizing this section, I will try to draw attention to those factors which most closely identify Mills and which seemed to influence his approach to academic and political matters.

It appears that he was first and foremost, throughout his life, an independent and obstinate individual. We have seen that early in his life he was an isolated individual who was unable to form lasting bonds with his peers because of his family's frequent moves; he later rationalized this isolation as a desirable quality for the mission he had set himself to accomplish. As a youngster he sometimes faced the torments and rejection of other children; he in turn rejected his classmates, possibly as a defense against the pain of previous separations and taunts. As an adult, he seemed sensitive to similar situations, and the gruff, irascible attitude he was known for could have been a way of protecting himself from further pain; he rejected before he was rejected.¹² During his adult years, he

¹² Note how hard he took his failure as a novelist, and his rejection by classmates at Texas A and M. One could surmise that he viewed personal rejection as he viewed war: to reject was something within his own control; to be rejected was outside personal influence.

was a non-joiner, shying away from groups and preferring not to be labelled or identified as part of any specific group or organization. He had very few heroes.¹³ He seemed at times arrogant and combative, and was estranged from his academic peers and even at times from his family. Swados said that Mills was so totally absorbed day and night with other things that he merely kept up his apartment on principle and ignored his wife and daughter (Swados, 1967, p. 201). He was a rebel who withdrew from his colleagues and became, as Douglas F. Dowd termed it, an "intellectual gunfighter."¹⁴

13 Mills' intellectual hero was Thorstein Veblen; his political heroes, the Wobblies (Industrial Workers of the World); and another, apparently unknown hero, was his grandfather, Bragg Wright.

Bragg was a hard-working, independent cattle rancher who was supposedly shot in the back by the jealous husband of a woman he was involved with (Gillam, 1966, pp. 9-10). Gillam felt that Mills had created a mythical hero out of Bragg, a "model of what he deemed valuable in his background and which he wanted to incorporate into his own personality" (Gillam, 1966, p. 13). Mills seemed to long for his "cowboy heritage," the "ranch" and cattle thieves of the past to which he often referred, and to be like the grandfather who kept other men "just the other side of Winchester rifle range" (Gillam, 1966, p. 11).

14 See Douglas F. Dowd's discussion of Mills in his article, "Thorstein Veblen and C. Wright Mills: Science and Social Criticisms," in The New Sociology, Irving Horowitz, editor (New York, 1964), p. 58.

Mills often assumed what could be loosely termed a "he-man" attitude and style of life. He approached things in a way he described as "taking it big."¹⁵ Mills used the term mainly in an academic context, but it could be applied to his whole life style. It was as if he were always over-compensating for factors he perceived as insufficient or missing in his life.¹⁶ Being the self-assured but nevertheless insecure individualist he was, he had to be sure that whatever he did, he did bigger and better than anyone around him. This resulted in a kind of immoderation and self-absorption, an over-whelming passion for those things

15 See Dan Wakefield, "Taking it big: a memoir of C. Wright Mills," in Atlantic (September, 1971), pp. 65-71. Mills was described, while a professor at Columbia, as slightly over six feet tall, weighing about two hundred pounds; he usually wore hiking boots and a helmet or cap for motorcycle riding, and was strapped around with army surplus bags filled with notes and books. Mills often advised Wakefield himself to "take it big."

16 Gillam suggests that Mills may have acquired what might be called "feminine sensitivity" as a result of his early upbringing. As a youngster, he was surrounded primarily by the female members of the household, and engaged in such traditionally feminine pursuits as making jewelry and playing with dolls (Gillam, 1966, p. 19). Mills' later interest in poetry and artistic endeavors, Gillam suggests, may have been prompted by this sensitivity. His adult image of emphatic masculinity may have been an attempt to compensate for the lack of masculine influences in the early stages of his life. It seemed that he had to constantly prove his masculinity, as he had to prove his individuality.

that interested him.¹⁷ This passion seemed to be communicated to his audience through his writings, giving his books a certain life and power.

For many people this utter self-absorption was intolerable, and I must confess that there were occasions when it was for me also. But after a time it was borne in upon me that Mills could not function without the absolute conviction that what he was doing was not only right but was more important than what anybody else was doing. More than that, the unique thrust of his best work--I am thinking of the decade of the Fifties, of White Collar and The Power Elite--derived directly from his egocentricity. These books would have been paltry if they had not been informed throughout with a sense of the self-assurance of their author (Swados, 1967, pp. 201-202).

The foregoing biographical description is an attempt to trace and to highlight the development of certain attitudes, values, and personal characteristics which Mills came to possess, and to indicate some of those environmental contingencies which may have contributed to that development. The author

17 Harvey Swados, op. cit., pp. 200-202. Swados discussed some of these immoderate characteristics of Mills, describing one of them as a "very American form of gluttony":

"When he found a gadget that pleased him, he would seemingly try to corner the market in it; and when he became deeply involved in a mechanical hobby as with a car or a camera, his passion to possess all the peripheral gimmicks was really unbounded."

Mills, he says, would also make six or eight revisions of drafts before publication.

believes these factors to be basic to an understanding of Mills' approach to intellectual and political matters, for the research makes clear that Mills' private problems, mood, and values were to direct his public debates.

The following chapter attempts to show how these factors influenced Mills' intellectual debates. An attempt is also made to examine those intellectual orientations and theorists which directed him along certain intellectual paths and coupled with his personal values to form a comprehensive Millsian theory.

CHAPTER II

Intellectual Profile

What was the "magic" which C. Wright Mills possessed? Why did he become the singular intellectual "hero" of our age? How did he influence a generation of scholars, students and savants while at the same time suffering the outrages of ostracism and hostility from many professional sociologists? Did his reputation finally rest on his contribution to radical politics or to social science or to both (and if the last, what was the nature of the mix?) (Power, Politics, and People, 1963, p. 1).

These were the questions Horowitz asked in his introduction to Power, Politics, and People, and these are some of the questions we will ask and try to understand in the light of Mills' intellectual development.

Moral Values

A good starting point for understanding the intellectual work of Mills is--to use his concept-- to state those values which he cherished but thought threatened, and which probably spurred his intellectual debates. In his approach to social science, Mills was a passionate, moral man who held the values of truth, reason, and freedom very highly. It is true that these are abstract terms which every man would readily proclaim as his own ideals; but to Mills, these

meant something more than intellectual rationalizations for his acts: they were personal, but were also the central values of society, to be practiced not only in limited circles as they are now, but as something to be worked at consciously and continually by all men for the benefit of the whole society. His conscious dedication to these values gave his works a commitment and evangelistic zeal which is often missing in the analytical, detached works of other intellectuals.¹

Throughout his life Mills was one of the most individualistic of men, autonomy and independence--thus, freedom--being dear and personal values which he spent his life trying to achieve.

Underlying his search for absolute self-awareness was the fundamental demand for absolute autonomy which was itself born of temperamental necessity. Such personal freedom, he believed, could be achieved only through self-knowledge and self-control; in this he was a child of the enlightenment, seeing freedom as something to be rationally achieved (Gillam, 1966, p. 68).

In defining freedom, Mills says,

Freedom is not merely the chance to do as

¹ See R.B. Notesstein, "The Moral Commitment of C. Wright Mills," F.H. Blum, "C. Wright Mills' Social Conscience and Social Values," and others in The New Sociology, Irving Horowitz, ed. (New York, 1964), for more about Mills' moral commitments and values.

one pleases; neither is it merely the opportunity to choose between set alternatives. Freedom, is, first of all, the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them--and then, the opportunity to choose (Sociological Imagination, p. 175).

This was his intellectual definition. Personally, freedom seemed to have meant the escape from control of all others. This is the perception that B.F. Skinner discusses in Beyond Freedom and Dignity.² He thinks this concept is spread by the pervasive literature of freedom which sees control as being diametrically opposed to freedom, thus making all forms of control "bad." Mills seemed to spend his life trying to avoid control by any and all.

Early in his career, Mills tried to achieve a kind of freedom through academic means, through self-analysis, and his own will-power. We saw that he was influenced by individualistic literature which stressed the power of will and personal endeavor. If the reader will remember, such titles as Mind Mastery and Making Your Own World were included in his early reading material. Later, it became more obvious that to free himself meant to free society as well. This shift

2 B.F. Skinner, Beyond Freedom and Dignity (New York, 1971), p. 41. The problem, Skinner claims, is to free man from certain types of aversive control but not all control, for many essential social practices necessitate control of one human being by another.

from perceiving freedom and power as states of mind, resting within the individual, to an environmental perspective where it existed primarily within the society; was prompted by the writings of the social psychologist Cooley and the pragmatists such as Dewey, James, and Mead. In the literature of freedom that Mills later produced, he related freedom and power to control of the individual's life by others (whether they be elites or other groups), and not in terms of abstract concepts of religion or states of mind. For Mills, freedom and reason were inextricably bound, and the free person was the seat of reason.

The role of reason in human affairs and the idea of the free individual as the seat of reason are the most important themes inherited by twentieth century social scientists from philosophers of the enlightenment. If they are to remain key values in terms of which troubles are specified and issues focused, then the ideals of reason and freedom must now be re-stated as problems in more precise and solvable ways than have been available to earlier thinkers and investigators. For in our time, these two values, reason and freedom, are in obvious yet subtle peril (Mills, 1959, pp. 167-168).

He strongly believed in the rationalist ideal and the ability of the individual to reason. This is not to say that he did not realize that men were often irrational in their behaviour. In explaining the formation of personality in Character and Social Structure, he notes that men frequently react to new situations with

old responses which have become habits, and that these responses are often inadequate and irrational. He gives the impression, however, that most of man's irrational actions are caused by insufficient knowledge or incorrect information, sometimes deliberately released as such by ruling, self-serving groups.³ The tone of his writings suggests that man for the most part will be rational if given the truth, the information about alternatives, and possible aversive consequences in the path to their goals.

For Mills, to free the individual through rationality meant the acquisition of knowledge, knowledge of the self and how it relates to structural and historical processes in the society. Man, by becoming aware of his troubles, his threatened values, will be able to see the connection between them and public issues, and so, through reason, be able to correct the problem. Knowledge and reason implied truth, and it is by exposing the "fact," the truth, that man is able to have knowledge of the situation and is able to rectify it. It is suggested that these beliefs led to his perception of sociology as an "intellectual mudraking," as previously mentioned; and it is said that this fact prompted his empirical research during

3 C.W. Mills, Character and Social Structure, p. 154.

the middle Forties (Gillam, 1966, p. 91).⁴

What were the components of rationality, and how exactly did Mills perceive it within the individual and within society? Rational uniformity within society, Mills says,

...involves the orientation of persons to similar, ulterior expectations; it is an action by which men strive to exploit opportunities in their own self interest. Rational uniformities are only expediently oriented to norms, duties, or to felt obligations. Their stability as patterns of conduct rest on the deviators running the risk of damaging his own interest (Character and Social Structure, p. 265).

Ideally, Mills saw rationality as a kind of communication, a means of handling public problems efficiently and effectively, with equal benefits for all concerned. The final goal of this rationality should be directed towards increased freedom for all individuals in the society. He did not, however, see this happening in all rationally organized societies:

Rationally organized social arrangements are not necessarily a means of increased freedom--for the individual or for the society. In fact, often they are a means of

⁴ These included studies of American business elites and labour unions. See articles such as, "The American Business Elite: A Collective Portrait," The Journal of Economic History, Vol. 4, 4 (December, 1945), pp. 20-44; "The Trade Union Leader," Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 9, 2 (Summer, 1945), pp. 158-175; "The Middle Classes in Middle-Sized Cities," American Sociological Review, 11 (October, 1946), pp. 520-529.

tyranny and manipulation, a means of expropriating the very chance to reason, the very capacity to act as free men (Sociological Imagination, p. 169).

This problem is created because freedom and reason are not always seen as the key values in terms of which issues and troubles are specified and focused.

As opposed to rationality, which is located in the society, Mills perceived reason as primarily an individual value:

Within an individual's biography and within a society's history, the social task of reason is to formulate choices, to enlarge the scope of human decisions in the making of history (Sociological Imagination, p. 174).

He saw reason as being somewhat like the will or impulse which he described as innate within man.⁵ This volition, he said, is self-movement of the organism, a deliberate move to choose among several possible activities. Early in life, the human infant's impulses may be undefined or random; but through a process of conditioning, he comes to develop a sense of purpose, and his impulses are directed towards socially approved objectives. At this stage of development, when man directs his impulses towards specific goals, he has acquired the ability to reason.

The link between reason and freedom is thus obvious

⁵ C.W. Mills, Character and Social Structure, pp. 44-48.

and vital; freedom is the chance to formulate available choices and the opportunity to choose, whereas reason is the ability to formulate those choices and make the best choice in relation to the perceived goal.

The primary goal that each individual should be working towards, Mills felt, is that of increased freedom for himself but without enslaving others, deliberately or unintentionally. Most of man's major efforts throughout history have been in some way directed towards gaining increased freedom; and, as B.F. Skinner suggests, "a great deal of physical technology is the result of this kind of struggle for freedom" (Skinner, 1971, p. 27). Freedom is, however, unevenly distributed in society, with some acquiring it at the expense of others. Mills felt that even irresponsibility, self-indulgence, and lack of consideration as to how one's manipulation and management of others can restrict their freedom, are part and parcel of man using man. For this reason, he maintained, the goals of reason and freedom have to be made explicit. Thus, if the explicit goal of the society is rational organization, this must be coupled with the goal of increased freedom for all the individuals in that society.

It is understandable that a man as independent and individualistic as Mills should put so much emphasis on man's ability to reason: the one who cannot reason must necessarily allow others to do it for him, thus losing his own independence. Horowitz, however, felt that Mills placed too much faith in this:

Mills was so imbued with the rationalist ideal that he perhaps placed too great rather than too little stress upon the curative powers of knowledge. He tended to underestimate the powers of personal and class interest as effective deterrents to change (Horowitz, 1963, p. 18).

Mills was unable to understand or accept that men would act irrationally even after being exposed to facts and the possible consequences of their activities. Why were some men unwilling or unable to exert themselves to acquire the reason that freedom requires?

Under what conditions are they willing and able to bear the burdens freedom does impose, and to see these less as burdens than as gladly undertaken self transformation? And on the negative side: can men be made to want to become cheerful robots? (Sociological Imagination, p. 175).

Mills might have been more tolerant, though not necessarily accepting, of human irrationality if certain Skinnerian concepts had been available to him at the time. Skinner's system of rewards, punishments, and reinforcers helps to explain why men will often gratify some immediate need even at the expense of creating

a potentially harmful situation later. These future harmful circumstances Skinner refers to as deferred aversive consequences.⁶ Though an individual may be aware of the possibility, or even certainty, of such consequences, they may be so remote that he believes he can deal with them when they arise. (A classic example is the case of the man who overeats, knowing full well the problems obesity will create.) Mills, however, could not accept such unreasonable actions, especially on the social level. He was thus intolerant of intellectuals and so-called men of knowledge who seemed unconcerned about the aversive consequences he himself perceived for the future of American society. He wrestled with the problem of the happy slave, especially as it affected the white collar worker. Why would the worker accept the puny material rewards offered to him when in fact he is being exploited--and frequently knows this? Can he not see that this will lead to increased misery and loss of freedom for him? Mills' own deep belief in reason and knowledge led him to underestimate the fact that men would frequently choose to satisfy an immediate need and worry about the consequences later. This, to him, was immoral.

⁶ B.F. Skinner, op. cit. See especially Chapter Two, pp. 27-43, which deals with the concept of freedom.

Mills was very much involved with public morality; his writings are sprinkled with moral judgments and criticisms of immorality in society.⁷ He defines morals as:

What a man calls moral judgment is merely his desire to generalize, and so make available for others, those values he has come to choose (Mills, 1959, p. 178).

The moral principles which he tried to universalize and make available for others were truth, reason, and freedom. He was a loner who was not actively involved in furthering the objectives of any specific organizations, groups, classes, or nations, and tried consciously to be unbiased in stating these values as objectives for all individuals in society. This brought him to a moral position and made him, essentially, a moralist.

Immorality, for Mills, involved any acts or values which were difficult to subsume under those broader values. Such acts were usually wrong in that they were harmful in the long run either to the person committing them or to some other. They would include acts such as stealing--by corrupt politicians from public treasuries or petty larceny by common citizens; irresponsible

⁷ C.W. Mills, The Power Elite, p. 343. Chapter 15 is entitled, "The higher immorality," and on pp. 338-341, he cited several examples of what he considered to be public immorality.

management and decisions by public leaders; or even the hedonistic lifestyles of elitist groups in the society. The man who does not take a moral position is also immoral; thus the intellectual, a man supposedly of reason, and with the ability to choose among alternatives, who does not make his values explicit, is allowing immoral individuals to exploit others. As far as Mills was concerned, any man who claims, or is believed, to be of substantial reason, and who refuses, or cannot, universalize his values in terms of their benefit for the whole society, is either immoral or ignorant.

Mills' absolute moral position also meant that he was often critical of others, was easily outraged, and was not frequently kind to those with whom he disagreed. Charles Frankel, a Columbia philosopher whom Mills criticised for taking part in the war effort (Gillam, 1966, p. 114), therefore said of him that he wished to be a moralist but did not have the equipment. He thought that Mills knew so little about people that he really had no idea if the typist he wrote about in White Collar, and for whom he felt so sorry, was as unhappy as he imagined. His brutal criticisms also led to the feeling that he loved people in theory but found it hard to relate to them

in practice.⁸

Regardless of what may be considered personal shortcomings, Mills nevertheless tried to be moral, to state his values in terms of their good for the betterment of all mankind, and very often to cast his terms in moral absolutes. He was a very practical man, yet seemed to be an idealist; he did not condone the petty, he would not compromise, he believed in absolute dedication to whatever he did and expected this of everyone; yet he was a practical man who realized the futility of his efforts, though somewhere in the back of his mind he hoped that men would be able to attain the Utopian society he dreamt of.

To achieve the Utopian society of free men, Mills assigned the intellectual, and especially the social scientist, a specific and very important role.⁹ His program was directed by his values of freedom and rationality, as well as elements of these such as democracy, peace, and material well-being. These were

8 "Legend of the Left," Newsweek, 63 (May 11, 1964), pp. 91-92. This is, of course, the moral issue of the happy slave, or, as Mills termed it, the cheerful robot. See Sociological Imagination, p. 175. Mills felt it was his moral duty to notify the white collar workers of the facts and alternatives--better to be an aware robot than a cheerful but unaware one.

9 C.W. Mills, "The social role of the intellectual," in Horowitz, op. cit., p. 292.

values, Mills believed, which all men desired and held dear.

Criticisms of Social Science

Mills did not think that the intellectuals in his society were fulfilling the role they were supposed to, so he directed certain criticisms to them, stating the specific functions he thought they should perform.

He completely rejected the prevailing notion of achieving a value-free sociology, and refuted the so-called "end of ideology" consensus among social scientists prevalent at that time.¹⁰ It is impossible, Mills said, for the social scientist to detach himself from values, for he is already working on the basis of certain values inherent in the tradition of social sciences in Western society. These ideals are truth, freedom, and the role of reason in human endeavors. Mills, however, thought that many social scientists had lost sight of these; their work was too often directed by other ideals, frequently even for selfish interests. He contended that it was the responsibility of the social scientist to be vigilant, to examine himself constantly in order to be aware of his every hidden value, and to realize that values

¹⁰ Daniel Bell, The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties (New York, 1962).

are the primary materials of social science. He must realize that the problems he chooses to examine in society are usually manifestations of personal troubles and public issues that have been threatened.

The social scientist, Mills believed, had confused moral non-commitment with objectivity, but it was up to him to understand that his product could be utilized in the manipulations of human beings, and it was therefore his responsibility to see that it was not misused and that it was communicated to the public. What Mills was doing, in effect, was forcing the social scientist to formulate an ideology, to state what motivates his work, and to say what purposes it should be used for. The scientist who is apolitical and refuses to state his values and the purposes of his work is in fact condoning the status quo by leaving it up to others to decide its uses, knowing quite well it is often used for limited interests.

Mills spent considerable effort criticising the entire field of sociology and the direction he saw it taking. Some of his best efforts were realized in Sociological Imagination, in which he discussed and rejected prevalent styles of social science research, which he believed were irrelevant to the human condition. Mills always seemed to be at his best in polemical writings, and this book is of that nature. It

is, in fact, a kind of sociological reflection on Mills' part: it brings together, in a comprehensive manner, most of his scattered thoughts on the discipline of sociology.¹¹

Grand Theory

Mills rejected, first of all, social science which lacked historical perspective, and which viewed society essentially as an equilibrium system maintained by functioning institutions. He was disturbed by theories which attributed mysterious cores or essential natures to man. What the sociologist essentially observed, instead, was man agreeing and disagreeing, conflict and cooperation, and men organizing and manipulating the world to suit their interests. For these reasons, Mills objected to one style of social science study which he called "Grand theory."¹² Grand theory, for Mills, was signified by the works of Talcott Parsons and certain other intellectuals

¹¹ Other earlier articles dealing with the concepts in The Sociological Imagination include: "Two styles of research in current social studies," Philosophy of Science 20: 4 (October, 1953), pp. 266-275; "IBM Plus Reality Plus Humanism= Sociology," Saturday Review of Literature (May, 1954), pp. 11-16. He even touched on a few themes developed in The Power Elite.

¹² The Sociological Imagination, pp. 25-49. Also in an article, "IBM Plus Reality Plus Humanism= Sociology," in I. Horowitz, op. cit.

in the structural functionalist tradition. He also objected to obscurantism in grand theory, and the unintelligible nature of the grand theorists' writings; but most of all he objected to the implied inevitability of certain institutions and their functions in society. Mills could not accept any doctrine that inferred that man was guided by inevitable abstract forces, for he was an advocate of reason and will; a doctrine that spoke of inevitable social institutions and that tried to describe all societies as autonomous systems which always conform to certain structures was too rigid; it did not leave room for the wilful, rational arrangement of society by the individuals in it. It also made it difficult to explain social change. Furthermore, the social scientists who accept these conceptualizations, Mills thought, are in fact creating an ideology for those already in authority, for by this means those in power could justify their rule over institutions as though it were a necessary consequence of any society.

Abstracted Empiricism

The other style of social science research that Mills objected to was what he referred to as "abstracted empiricism." The practitioner of this style whom Mills centered on was Paul Lazarsfeld, who conducted

several public opinion polls dealing with advertising, media research, and voting behaviour. Abstracted empiricism¹³ generally involves molecular or small-scale problems, and uses statistical models of verification. In practice, the data are obtained through the set interview and population sampling, then punched on computer cards. Very often elaborate cross-tabulations and classifications are made and the result is converted into some form of statistical assertion. Using exaggeration and wit to get his point across, Mills commented on the scientific pretensions of the group by describing them thus:

The first camp is that of the scientists who are very much concerned to be known as such. Among them, I am sure, are those who would love to wear white coats with an I.B.M. symbol of some sort on the breast pocket. They are out to do with society and history what they believe physicists have done with nature (Mills, 1963, p. 569).

Among this group, he said, is the higher statistician who breaks down truth and falsity into such fine particles that we cannot tell the difference between them, and who, by the costly rigour of his method, succeeds in trivializing man and society, and in the process, his own mind as well (Mills, 1963, p. 569).

13 See The Sociological Imagination, pp. 50-75, and such articles as, "Two Styles of Research in Current Social Studies," in Power, Politics, and People.

He did not, however, object to the method of study as much as the content. He showed he could engage in statistical research as efficiently as any man; he directed studies for unions and government; he did a study of Puerto Rican migration;¹⁴ he worked on various other research projects for the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University. He could not, however, understand why anyone would waste time to study "the impact of work-play relationships among lower income families on the south side of the block on 112th Street between Amsterdam and Broadway."¹⁵ To Mills, the scope of abstracted empiricism was too narrow; its practitioners were too timid to attack large problems or areas in which there was a scarcity of data. He acknowledged that their method was often very precise, but claimed they had not used it to examine anything worthwhile. They did not, he asserted, give much substantive knowledge, for "first there must be methodological inquiries into methodology and inquiry" (Power, Politics, and People, 1963, p. 560).

¹⁴ C.W. Mills, The Puerto Rican Journey: New York's Newest Migrants (New York, 1950).

¹⁵ Mills used this as an example to Dan Wakefield of the kinds of precise irrelevancies and trivia students at Columbia were doing for their Ph.D. theses. See Dan Wakefield, "Taking it big: a memoir of C. Wright Mills," p. 70.

There were many who objected to Mills' criticisms, of course, and felt that he was unfair. They defended their work on the grounds that what they were doing might seem trivial to him, but they, like Mendel, whose experiments on peas also seemed trivial, might some day discover the equivalent of genetic laws. Mills, on the other hand, may have been reacting quite strongly to what he saw as a trend of the future. He envisioned a new breed of semi-trained social technicians who would merely be servants for the bureaucratic machinery, and who were lacking severely in sociological imagination. Most of all, he could not accept the moral non-commitment of this group, who were willing to perceive themselves as mere service personnel available for the use of whoever was willing to pay for their services. This type of social scientist, Mills claimed, was serving only his own and the bureaucratic interests; he was unable to perceive society as a whole and could not place his work in perspective nor properly identify the root of his values. His pretensions to scientific objectivity were unreal; he was only shirking his responsibility in quantifying everything and having nothing to say about the quality or value of his studies. Horowitz comments on the problem:

The truth, of course, is not that values have actually disappeared from the social sciences, rather that the social scientist has become so identified with the going value system. This phenomenon serves to reinforce the view that sociological empiricism is indeed the only form of useful sociology, since it alone confirms the dominant American attitude regarding the morally uncommitted as the necessary counterpart to the scientifically objective (Horowitz, 1964, p. 10).

Mills' objections, then, to these two styles of social science research--grand theory and abstracted empiricism--were more than just an intellectual exercise. Even his criticism of the "turgid and polysyllabic prose" which seems to prevail in the social sciences was a personal attack. It is said that he himself attached a magical quality to the power of writing and tried to commit to paper, with precision, fluency, and clarity, all that he believed. He objected to what he considered the unpragmatic and general nature of grand theory, its obscurantism and dependence upon inevitabilities, and its lack of historical and biographical perspective. On the other hand, he disagreed with abstract empiricism for the small-scale problems it examined, its pretensions to be like the natural sciences, its lack of historical perspective, and its lack of moral judgment and value orientation. Mills' alternative for these two styles is what he called the sociological imagination.

Social Role of the Intellectual

The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for inner life and external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social position. Within that welter, the framework of modern society is sought, and within that framework the psychologies of a variety of men and women are formulated. By such means the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues (Mills, 1959, p. 5).

Mills outlines the three roles he sees social scientists traditionally conceiving themselves of filling. First, is that of the philosopher-king generally associated with Auguste Comte. This role stresses the importance of reason in human affairs and believes the man of reason is best equipped to lead society. This position, however, is rejected because it is undemocratic and involves an aristocracy. The second, most usual, role is to be the advisor to the king. This position, too, is rejected by Mills, because the social scientist tends to become a part of functionally rational bureaucracies and so loses his moral autonomy and substantive rationality. The third role is the one Mills chose, that of the social scientist

who must remain independent, selecting his own problems and own work, and directing it to publics and kings alike.

Such an independent social scientist should perform the following functions:

1. He should be a political intellectual. Such an intellectual is "one who refuses to accept injustice as fate and whose refusal takes a political form" (Gillam, 1966, p. 84).
2. He should determine the limits of freedom and the role of reason in history, once he accepts those values. Although he is independent, he should not see himself standing outside society, for no man can do that; but he should be aware of where he is located within it (Sociological Imagination, p. 184).
3. His task is to transcend the milieu in which he lives, and as an educator should not only teach technical skills but also how the public is to transcend their milieux, how to debate and decide what they want out of life, and how to cultivate their values (Sociological Imagination, pp. 184-185).
4. He should study the chances of men, in any given social structure, to become free, rational individuals. He should study the chance of every man to

act with consequence on the structure of his society. This means he should study the structure of power and its sources (Sociological Imagination, p. 184).

5. Once the social scientist has done these things he should direct his work to three audiences: those men who have power and are aware of it; those whose actions have consequences but are not aware of it; and those without any power whose awareness is confined to their everyday milieux. He should translate personal troubles and show how they relate to structural issues for these people (Sociological Imagination, p. 185).

This last belief lay at the bottom of Mills' pamphlet-eering towards the end of his career, and his call for the deprofessionalisation of sociology and its return to the public from which it came.

What are the chances of success for social science to free society? Mills did not think the chances were very good, given the political structure in which we now live. He was an optimist and an idealist, but he recognized certain practical factors which would prevent social science from performing the functions he outlined. What are required for the social scientist to play his role effectively, he said, are parties, movements, and publics having two characteristics:

that "within them ideas and alternatives of social life are truly debated; and that they have a chance really to influence decisions of structural consequence" (Mills, 1959, p. 190). He summarizes his views on this point:

I do not believe social science will "save the world"--a phrase which I take here to mean the avoidance of war and the rearrangement of human reason and freedom; such knowledge as I have leads me to embrace rather pessimistic estimates of the chances. But even if that is where we now stand, still we must ask: If there are ways out of the crises of our period by means of intellect, is it not up to the social scientist to state them? (Mills, 1959, p. 193).

Mills, then, perceived the only hope for the ideal of freedom in society to rest in the intellect and man's ability to reason. The true social scientist should be a dedicated intellectual and within him should be seated the highest forms of reason and intellect. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the social scientist to plan a free Utopian future for society; and to do this, he must accept the values of reason and freedom, be independent, be political (that is, politically conscious), for to free individuals society must first be freed, and to free society inevitably involves the use of political power.

Every great thinker has been influenced by some past intellectual tradition. Mills' values and perspective

of sociology and society were no doubt also shaped by some such definite intellectual tradition. Certain values and attitudes which he developed early in life may have been responsible for his selection of and attraction to specific theories and theorists; but these values were inevitably broadened and clarified by those intellectual influences.

Intellectual Orientation

Mills said, "Every thinker tries to select his own intellectual past and is in turn shaped by it."¹⁶ His own intellectual past can easily be traced to his early mentors--Veblen and the pragmatists Dewey, Mead, James, and Pierce. His later writings were influenced by the German thinkers Marx, Weber, and Mannheim, and those theorists of the Franco-Italian tradition such as Pareto, Mosca, Michels, and Sorel.

Veblen

Veblen was of singular importance in the development of Mills' career. He was, as we have seen, Mills' intellectual hero, and it was from him that Mills borrowed his form of evolutionary institutional analysis. Both analyzed society in terms of its "elite." For Veblen, it was the "vested interest" and the "leisure

¹⁶ C.W. Mills, Images of Man: The Classic Tradition in Sociology (New York, 1960), p. 12.

class," while Mills spoke in terms of the "power elite." They are often compared as social critics, and they shared several common values: peace, rationality, democracy, and the material well-being of man.¹⁷

It is suggested that Veblen was more than a mere intellectual influence on Mills, for Mills seemed to identify even with his very egocentric personality, and appeared to make efforts to incorporate aspects of that personality into his own.¹⁸ Veblen was to Mills a home-grown radical much like those "recalcitrant Americans," the Wobblies, a group of radical industrial workers that Mills deeply admired.¹⁹

Mills said of Veblen:

He was a masterless, recalcitrant man, and if we must group him somewhere in the American scene, it is with those most recalcitrant Americans, the Wobblies. On the edges

17 Dowd, op. cit., pp. 54-65.

18 See R.A. Gillam, pp. 42-43 (footnote). He thinks Mills had created a mythical figure of Veblen much as he had of his grandfather, making him as he wanted him to be, not as he was. He seems to have modelled Veblen after Mills rather than Mills after Veblen.

19 The exact origin of the name "Wobbly" is obscure, but it was the common nickname of members of the Industrial Workers of the World, a trade union from 1905 to 1917 in the U.S. They valued their independence and opposed many capitalist practices in America's labour system. Many of their aims, practices, and attitudes corresponded to those of Mills. For a complete history, see P.S. Foner, History of the Labour Movement in the United States, Vol. 4 (New York, 1965).

of the higher learning, Veblen tried to live like a Wobbly. It was a strange place for such an attempt. The Wobblies were not learned, but they were like Veblen, masterless men, and the only non-middle class movement of revolt in twentieth century America. With his acute discontent and shyness of program, Veblen was a sort of intellectual Wobbly.²⁰

He also wrote of himself: "I am a Wobbly. I mean this spiritually and politically" (Gillam, 1966, p. 42).

Besides Veblen, there was another native intellectual influence operating on Mills--the pragmatist.

Pragmatism

Horowitz explains Mills' attitude to pragmatism:

It has been wisely said that man never really overcomes his first love. I take this to be the case in intellectual matters no less than in romantic affairs. Mills' first intellectual attraction was for pragmatism. As a young scholar it was for him a way of life, a set of propositions about the nature of the world.²¹

Pragmatism concerns the practical and the efficient, and one of its basic precepts is that every truth has practical consequences; and these consequences are the test of truth. It was a general philosophy or mental

²⁰ Mills, in his Introduction to Veblen's The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions (New York, 1953), p. ix.

²¹ C.W. Mills, Sociology and Pragmatism: The Higher Learning in America, Irving Horowitz, ed. (New York, 1966), pp. 11-12. See the Introduction for a fuller description of the pragmatists' influence on Mills.

attitude that was part of a reaction against the intellectualistic speculation which was so common in modern metaphysics.²² The pragmatic movement is most often associated with Charles Sander Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, and it is from them that Mills acquired some of his pragmatic outlook and developed his own pragmatic attitudes.²³ In fact, Mills majored in philosophy, as we have seen, and his Ph.D. dissertation, "A Sociological Account of Pragmatism," was an effort to determine the concepts of Peirce, James and Dewey in terms of their sociological context and their respective careers.²⁴

Pragmatism was probably attractive to Mills because it supported his own beliefs, in its emphasis "upon the power of man's intelligence to control his destiny" (Mills, 1963, p. 292). Through the pragmatists, he developed a concern for social problems

22 Encyclopedia Britannica, "Pragmatism," Vol. XXII, eleventh edition, 1911.

23 For a more thorough treatment of pragmatic thinkers in the U.S., see Andrew Reck, Recent American Philosophy (New York, 1962); Alfred Ayer, The Origins of Pragmatism: Studies in the Philosophy of Charles Sander Peirce and William James (London, 1968); Morton White, Social Thought in America (Boston, 1957); et al.

24 Previously unpublished, but now called Sociology and Pragmatism, edited and with an introduction by Irving Horowitz.

and a contempt for metaphysics. His early rejection of religion indicated his own developing dislike for transcendental concepts, and later, his criticisms of general theories of action, which he believed speculated a great deal about the nature of society and man but did not demonstrate enough, also revealed his pragmatic spirit.

Horowitz suggests that it was this base that accounted for his high regard for labour intellectuals.²⁵ As opposed to academic intellectuals, labour intellectuals were in the midst of action and creative processes, and were able to ground their theories and test their ideas in action. Mills himself became allied with the labour movement, and wrote almost exclusively for them in the late Forties.²⁶

Mills' approach to social psychology seems also to have been anchored in the pragmatist tradition, especially in the work of G.H. Mead.

²⁵ C.W. Mills, The New Men of Power: America's Labor Leaders (New York, 1948).

²⁶ In the Forties, Mills published at least twelve articles related to labour; eight of these were published in Labour and Nation. Labour and Nation was started by J.B.S. Hardman in 1945, in the hopes of providing a forum for members and intellectuals from both the American Federation of Labour and the Congress of Industrial Organization.

Mead and Freud

John Dewey, William James, and George Herbert Mead were involved in that perspective of functional psychology which is concerned with the function of the mind and how it is used in the adaptation of the organism to its environment.²⁷ Like the sociology of knowledge, it emphasized the importance of the interdependent relationship between the individual and the group. Mills' strong interest in the sociology of knowledge was no doubt nurtured by the social philosophy of Dewey and James; but it was from Mead that he acquired the essence of his social psychology.

Mills' major concern in social psychology was in pinning down the precise mechanism by which the individual and the group were linked and maintained. This process is what is involved in the formation of character structure.²⁸ Mills thought that Mead's concept of "the generalized other" was the most explicit theory yet formulated to deal with the question. The "generalized other" was basically an internalized audience of significant people in the thinker's life with whom

²⁷ See Duane P. Schultz, A History of Modern Psychology (New York, 1969), pp. 84-150.

²⁸ C.W. Mills, Character and Social Structure.

he conversed.²⁹ In making any decision the individual consults with this internalized audience. For Mills, this was an adequate explanation of the development of social consciousness and social conscience.

Mills believed that Freud, too, played an important part in the formulation of a theory of character structure.³⁰ Freud's concept of the superego, which Mills indicated as being the closest point of contact between Mead and Freud, specifies the social and biographical locus of the generalized other. Freud's theory emphasized the importance of the family in the early phases of development and in the acquisition of conscience. There was a shortcoming, however, that Mills thought was inherent in Freudian theory: its concern with attributing social regularities to universal constants. This, he thought, made Freud's notion of personality socially inflexible.

Mills thought that when Freud and Mead were integrated, they provided one of the best models of character structure, but that their conceptions of social structure were inadequate. For this, he looked to Marx, Mannheim, and Weber.

29 For a thorough discussion of Mead's concepts, see G.H. Mead, Mind, Self, and Society (Chicago, 1934).

30 Character and Social Structure, pp. xiv-xvii.

Marx, Weber, Mannheim, et al.

Mills was duly impressed by the great historical perspective of Marx, Mannheim, and Weber. He admired their ability to compare large social entities in different historical epochs, and to demonstrate the varying effects these social entities and historical periods had on the individuals in them. Most important, they showed that there were concrete connections between the individual modes of thought and the institutions and social structures that existed.

Although Mills believed these men to be developers of the most complete models of social structure, he also perceived a shortcoming in their work. He was not satisfied with what he considered their obscure psychology which tried to link the individual and society. Although they had established a definite link, they were not sufficiently explicit; they did not explore the mechanism by which the link was made. In "Language, Logic, and Culture," Mills criticized the Marxist for inadequate analysis in trying to relate ideas and societal factors, for example. Even more sophisticated sociologies of knowledge, like Mannheim's, demonstrated the same deficiency. To Mills, Mannheim's use of the term "collective unconscious" was utilized to cover up this psychological inadequacy.

Mills saw it as his task to clear up the problem

this could be accomplished, he claimed, by integrating the character structure models of Freud and especially Mead with the social structure models of Mannheim, Marx, and Weber. Through Mead's significant and generalized other, the process could be easily demonstrated by which individuals develop patterns of behaviour and ways of thinking which were in accordance with the groups and institutional structures to which they may belong.

Marx was perhaps the first to emphasize how institutional structures could create ideas and ways of thinking, and Mannheim later developed the concepts to a higher degree. Mills, however, did not approach this major sociology of knowledge concept directly through Marx or Mannheim. It seems that Marxism was a relatively late development for him, one that he approached indirectly through Veblen. The Marxist,³¹ for example, was a late effort on Mills' part to carry on the dialogue with Marx that other theoreticians before him had begun. He did, however, hint at the central importance of Marx in an earlier book, The Images of Man.³²

In Images of Man, Mills noted that Weber was also

31 C.W. Mills, The Marxist (New York, 1962).

32 C.W. Mills, The Images of Man (New York, 1960).

essentially responding to Marx in his writings, although he took the opposite course, emphasizing the effects independent ideas had on modifying or creating institutions.³³

Mills, like Weber, believed strongly in the practical worth and power of ideas, but he saw the idea as a tool to be used by the intellectual whose essential role was to be a purveyor of ideas in political movements. It was the task of the individual to create an ideology around which the people could coalesce.

Mills had a life-long interest in Weber apart from his concern with the theories of the influence of ideas; he was later to adapt Weber's analysis of bureaucracy, as well as to collaborate with Hans Gerth in writing an introduction and publishing a book of Weber's essays, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology.

Finally, theorists from the Franco-Italian tradition also influenced Mills, especially in his analysis of power and bureaucracy. In writing about the classic theorists, Mills noted that Mosca, Michels, and Pareto, in their several ways, traced out various

³³ Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (New York, 1958). Weber shows the autonomous role of ideas in the origin of capitalism. He demonstrated how religious ideas indirectly contributed to the rise of a capitalist economy.

meanings of bureaucracy, and introduced ideas of "the ruling class" or "elite." Mills used Michel and Mosca's ideas extensively, modifying them in his work on the power elite. In Images of Man, he considers Pareto's voluminous work on mind and society as somewhat pretentious, but gives him credit for the idea of the elites.

In addition to the preceding intellectual influences, there seems to have been a detectable pattern in Mills' intellectual development.

Intellectual Stages

Mills' intellectual development passed through distinct stages. Horowitz perceived him as passing through three such stages: first, philosophy; second, an intensive period of empirical research in the middle Forties; and thirdly, an effort at combining these into a workable style of sociological reflection. During these stages, he concentrated on four topics of discussion: knowledge, people, power, and politics.³⁴ This writer found these same categories efficacious and will use a modified version. It is preferable not to classify his sociological reflection as a distinct phase, for these were themes Mills dealt with throughout his career.

³⁴ Power, Politics, and People, p. 2.

Knowledge and Social Philosophy

In the early Forties, Mills' major articles were important contributions to the relatively new field of the sociology of knowledge. His first article, "Language, Logic, and Culture," was an elaboration on Mead's work in the explanation of mind and society. Mills thought that previous contributions to the sociology of knowledge did not adequately explain the mechanism that connects mind and society, so he proposed two hypotheses to help in the endeavor. The first was drawn from Mead's "generalized other" and "internalized audience." This, for him, was an adequate conceptualization and connection between the individual thinker and the group. The second hypothesis dealt with the place of language and logic in the thought process. With our acquisition of language, Mills believed, we are given structured ways of the group and the values implied in these ways. "Our behaviour and perception, our logic and thought, come within the controls of a system of language" (Mills, 1939, p. 433). Due to these factors, he felt we could locate a thinker socially and politically by analysing his vocabulary and the meanings attached to the words.

Another notable contribution was the article, "Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motives," which

further elaborated on problems first touched on in "Language, Logic, and Culture."³⁵ In part, it was a rebuttal to Freud's instinctual theory of motives; Mills stated that motives should not be looked at as an expression of prior elements within the individual. These well-springs of action are not available to us. Rather, we should see motives as a type of vocabulary used in specific situations. Motives are learned culturally; they are "accepted justifications for present, future, and past programs of acts" (Power, Politics, and People, p. 443). He also argued that vocabularies of motives were individually distinct, as in the case of Freudian motives which are mainly sexual, Marxian motives which are primarily economic, and the fact that most of the sociologists who attacked cities were from small towns or rural areas. Thus, if motives are perceived as vocabularies, we can locate an individual within the social structure by examining the language.

In "Methodological Consequences of the Sociology of Knowledge,"³⁶ he again developed themes from his

³⁵ Mills, in American Sociological Review, Vol. V, 6 (December, 1940), pp. 904-913.

³⁶ Mills, in American Journal of Sociology, XLVI, 3 (November, 1940), pp. 316-330.

first articles, and he also argued with those eminent thinkers of his time who thought that the sociology of knowledge was not related to epistemology. These thinkers, he asserted, believed in a universal truth independent of social and historical factors. To Mills, truth made sense only in terms of some accepted model of verification which in turn was itself a social product. The sociology of knowledge may lead to epistemological consequences by building a sounder and more critical method for social research. Mills said,

The content of social sciences should be detected...how values creep in, and how, if at all, they condition the direction, completeness, and warrantability of the results of research (Power, Politics, and People, p. 465).

Other articles in the sociology of knowledge include: "The Language and Ideas of Ancient China: Marcel Garnet's Contribution to the Sociology of Knowledge";³⁷ "The Professional Ideology of Social Pathologists,"³⁸ in which he examined the textbooks in the field of social disorganization and found a common style of thought and a liberal ideology among the authors, who were all from similar backgrounds.

Mills never neglected the ideas developed in these

37 Power, Politics, and People, pp. 469-520.

38 Ibid., pp. 525-552.

earlier stages; in fact, he tried to direct all his work with the precepts of the sociology of knowledge in mind; but he moved on to another academic phase in which he did extensive empirical work dealing with the problems of everyday people.

Empirical Research

In the late Forties, Mills launched a series of studies on such people as labour leaders, business and political elites, and the middle class in America.³⁹ He wrote several articles on subjects and problems which were the concerns of all people: sex, women, the designer, work and leisure, big cities, and morality.⁴⁰

The most well-known work of his concern with publics, or the middle classes, is White Collar. This book originated from his study of the "new middle classes" of six years earlier, in 1945. White Collar

³⁹ "The Trade Union Leader: A Collective Portrait," Public Opinion Quarterly, 9, 2 (Summer, 1945), pp. 158-175; Power, Politics, and People, pp. 77-96; "The American Business Elite: A Collective Portrait," Journal of Economic History, 4, 4 (December, 1945), pp. 120-144; Power, Politics, and People, pp. 110-139.

⁴⁰ See such articles as, "The Competitive Personality," "Plain Talk on Fancy Sex," "Diagnosis of Our Moral Uneasiness," "Women: The Darling Little Slaves," "The Big Cities: Private Troubles and Public Issues." All are included in Power, Politics, and People, Part III--People.

is Mills' vision of a predominant section of American society and the direction in which most of society is moving. He saw them mainly as an alienated, unorganized, dependent group of basically powerless people much like the often-discussed alienated blue-collar labourers. They worked at non-manual labour at better than average wages, and their social and political aspirations were towards a middle course. In effect, they had no ideology, no guiding ideals such as reason and freedom. They were a class without property, that supported in apparently contradictory ways the views of the bourgeois controllers of the means of production. They included such people as floorwalkers, typists, middle managers, foremen, laboratory assistants, various technicians, salesgirls, engineers, and a thousand kinds of clerks. These people lived a mass life, Mills believed, and were in many ways a classic example of Durkheim's anomic conceptualization. Mills believed their supposed malaise came from a decline of an aggressively libertarian, property-owning middle class. Some critics of Mills argued that these people that he had such pity for may not have been all that unhappy.⁴¹ Mills, probably, would have attributed

⁴¹ See discussion of the "cheerful robot" in The Sociological Imagination, p. 175, and earlier in the thesis.

even their happiness to a false consciousness on their part. He therefore felt it his duty, and the duty of other intellectuals, to expose the true factors of their condition, in order to let them be aware that they were really a massive, powerless, dependent force pushed this way and that by a selfish elite. He tried to show that the days of free enterprise were really over, that the small businesses and independent entrepreneurs were things of the past.

It is often said that White Collar was an expression of Mills' personal vision, and a desire to articulate his own experience in New York City.⁴² It was also an outline of the private troubles of a significant proportion of the United States.

At the end of this phase Mills moved into a primarily political dimension. He had dealt with people and their private troubles, and now he was ready to relate these troubles to public issues and structural processes.

⁴² Ralph Miliband, The New Sociology, p. 79; and Dan Wakefield, "Taking it big." Mills, in fact, admitted to Wakefield that White Collar was his impression of New York City.

CHAPTER III

Power and Politics

In many ways, Max Weber's life and thought are expressions of political events and concerns. His political stands which must be understood in terms of private contexts as well as public happenings, make up a theme inextricably interwoven with Weber the man and the intellectual. For he was a man and a political intellectual (Gerth and Mills, 1946, p. 32).

The preceding passage from Gerth and Mills' book could very well have been written about Mills himself, for he too was a political intellectual. He was, however, best known for his radical political ideas, and it was in this dimension that he probably had the greatest effect. He was considered the leading figure among the critics of that era in American history.¹ It should be noted, however, that he was not always a political radical.

Radical Political Development

It is said of Mills that it was the war that

¹ See T.B. Bottomore, Critics of Society: Radical Thought in North America (London, 1967), p. 54. He identified three periods in American history when critical thought was at a peak--the 1900's, 1930's, and 1960's. Mills was named the foremost critic of the 1950's, whose critical thoughts marked the beginning of the period that peaked in the 1960's.

triggered his political radicalism. He himself said that the war led him to a greatly increased interest in politics (Gillam, 1966, p. 70).² Following the war closely and "thinking about it," he recalled, "made me a radical" (Gillam, 1966, p. 79). In 1940, Mills was not yet a political intellectual; this was in part due to his age and place of birth. In the Thirties, he was too young for active political involvement, and he lived in a part of the United States not as radical as the urban centres. During these early years, he was still studying philosophy, and in the Thirties was "reading the literature of the Twenties." "During the Thirties," he remembered, "I was living in the Twenties and...during the early Forties, I was living in the Thirties" (Gillam, 1966, p. 71).

Although the war may have triggered Mills' radicalism, there were already certain prior elements that facilitated the conversion and stirred his interest in political affairs. This led Kenneth Stamp, an associate of Mills, to say,

I don't really think that the post-1946 Mills was all that different from the Mills of 1942 to 1946. He was always the outsider, always the rebel, always the slightly paranoid

² "In threatening personal terms," Mills wrote, "the war meant the rural idiocy and militarism of Texas A and M. In intellectual terms...it meant a greatly increased interest in politics."

believer in plots against himself and against the "good guys" generally. He was constantly scrutinizing his friends for signs that they were temporizing, compromising--"selling out."³

The writer would suggest again, like Gillam and others, that the following elements helped to stimulate his political interest:

1. His temperament, his personal quest for freedom and independence, led to his concern with politics and power, since he believed that personal and public issues intersect, and therefore to achieve solutions for one means to achieve solutions for the other.
2. His association with Gerth, Stamp, and Hofstadter, and later Franz Neuman, at Columbia, also helped to stimulate his interest.
3. The war, acting as a catalyst in combination with some of the preceding elements, was the final factor.

Power

Most of Mills' political works were geared towards power--its location, its form, how it is used, by whom, and for what purposes. He defines power as having "to do with whatever decisions men make about the arrangements

³ Stamp to Gillam in an interview. Gillam, p. 110.

under which they live and about the events that make up the history of their times" (Power, Politics, and People, p. 23). To understand why Mills was so concerned with power, we must take into consideration his personal feelings about it and the social context in which he lived.

As Horowitz points out, the dominant wings of sociology during the time Mills was most active (1940-1960) tended to perceive power as an intricate system of "pattern maintenance" and "tension management." It was seen as something to be viewed with awe--a kind of abstract divine force that was self-regulating (Power, Politics, and People, pp. 9-10). Furthermore, the uneven distribution of power was legitimized by functional structural theory, which took for granted the structural need or functional requirement of stratification and the inevitability of bureaucracy.

This kind of doctrine was totally unacceptable to Mills; it was against all his personal beliefs, so he spent considerable effort rejecting this theory and any other claims for power that were at odds with his own values. He realized that power in a highly bureaucratized and capitalistic society often functioned as an independent variable; but he was not willing to accept it as being inevitable or out of human control.

Power, he felt, rested ultimately in human beings and its human uses, and is therefore manipulable and ought to be controlled. Power should be an individual commodity in that each individual should be able to act with significance upon his environment. But this is not what Mills saw happening universally, and especially in American society.⁴

Perspectives of American Society

How did Mills perceive American society? Fundamentally, what he saw was a mass society without hope or plan, a society of white collar workers and powerless little men ruled by an immoral and mindless elite,

⁴ See Mills' review of Charles Morris' book, Paths of Life: Preface to a World Religion (New York, 1942). See also C.W. Mills, "Pragmatism, Politics, and Religion," originally in The New Leader (August and September, 1942); and Power Politics, and People, pp. 159-169.

In his book, Morris presented a quasi-religious approach to life. He considered six philosophies: the Buddhist path of detachment from desire; the Dionysian path of abandonment to primitive impulse; the Promethean path to creative work; the Appolonian path of moderation; the Christian path of love; and the Mohamadan way of holy war. Morris rejects these for a seventh, the "Maitreyan path," a combination of the Dionysian, Promethean, and the Buddhist.

Mills disagreed with Morris' approach. He thought it was a form of self-alienation, that Morris created an island within. Mills contended that to attain social change, we must work in the environment, we must use political power, for power is not in the hearts of men, but resides without. Morris' paths of life and "types of personality," with the former seated in the latter, leaned, for Mills, towards a biological determinism.

and a world travelling towards World War III. He looked towards the convergence of the intellectuals and labour for hope; but the intellectuals refused to formulate an ideology and withdrew instead from politics, while the labour leaders moved up to the middle levels of power and lost sight of their original goals.

Power Elite

Mills located the locus of power in three realms in the United States: the political, the economic, and the military.⁵ The few people who control these institutions had the power to make decisions that would modify the milieu of many other men. These institutions, he contended, were no longer unconnected distinct spheres, but were linked into a political economy tied up with the military. This had ascendancy over all other institutions such as education, religion, and the family. The men who controlled these institutions he called the "power elite." They were men of similar origin, education, career, and style of life, who rose to power because of certain institutional trends and opportunities of which they availed themselves, and, in the process, created a liaison between these various institutions. Mills did not think these elites were

⁵ C.W. Mills, The Power Elite, and "The Structure of Power in American Society," Power, Politics, and People, pp. 23-38.

representative men. They were, in his estimation, immoral men who were selected "by the means of power, the sources of wealth, and the mechanics of celebrity," and "they succeeded within the American system of organized irresponsibility" (Power Elite, p. 361). These were men who had power and were aware of it and its consequences.

Below the power elite were the middle levels of power, where groups of men struggled among themselves for power. They included labour unions, professional politicians, farm organizations, pressure groups, the Congress, and various interest groups such as universities. These men were not really involved with national interests; they were trying to achieve an advantage for themselves. These groups had some power but were not aware of its consequences, and in many cases were not interested.

At the bottom was the mass society. Its elements had little or no power, were unorganized, and had no ideology of their own, and were manipulated from the top. They included the expanding middle class, or white collar workers, and the remaining working class; but these two classes had developed a form of false consciousness. The white collars tried to remain distinct from the working class, and had expectations of working

their way to a more prestigious position, while the working class had accepted the values of the mass society, hoping for themselves and their children to rise to the white collar level. These groups "vicariously enjoy the prerogatives of the corporate rich, the nocturnal antics of the celebrity, and the sad-happy life of the very rich" (Power Elite, p. 345).

Mills' power elite concept probably drew the most criticism of all his works. Many of the criticisms were favourable, but they were matched by just as many unfavourable ones.⁶

Critics of The Power Elite

Mills classified his several critics into three categories: liberal, radical, and highbrow. Among his contemporary liberal critics were included such people as Robert Dahl, William Kornhauser, Talcott Parsons, Dennis Wrong, and A.A. Berle, Jr. They saw the power elite as a provocative but generally mistaken analysis of American society. They also disliked his methodology; and, in part, some of them were reacting to his personal attacks on them for their "celebration" of

⁶ For a comprehensive bibliography of review articles and essays on Mills' works, see Power, Politics, and People, pp. 632-641; for criticisms of Power Elite see Domhoff and Ballard, C. Wright Mills and the Power Elite (Boston, 1968).

American government.⁷ Also of note is Arnold Rose, a later critic who would also fit into this category.⁸

The general attitude of this group was summed up by Parsons and Rose, who disagreed with Mills' concept of power. Parsons argues that Mills adopted only one version of power:

The essential point...is that, to Mills, power is not a facility for the performance of function...on behalf of the society as a system, but it is interpreted exclusively as a facility for getting what one group, the holders of power, wants by preventing another group, the outs, from getting what it wants.

Parsons described power as having distributive functions as well as collective ones. Power is, he said,

...the capacity to mobilize the resources of the society for the attainment of goals for which a general "public" commitment has been made, or may be made (Parsons, 1960, p. 221).

His basic disagreement with Mills was that the socio-economic foundation is not particularly crucial to the question of power. He thought Mills underplayed

⁷ For his discussion of celebration, see The Power Elite, pp. 325-342, especially p. 335; and Power, Politics, and People, pp. 208-220.

⁸ Arnold M. Rose, The Power Structure: Political Process in American Society (New York, 1967).

⁹ Talcott Parsons, Structure and Process in Modern Societies (New York, 1960), p. 220; also in, "The Distribution of Power in American Society," World Politics (October, 1957), pp. 123-143.

the role of political parties and the judiciary, and he insisted that power serves to regulate the social order. Rose disagreed with what he considered to be an "economic-elite dominance" hypothesis by Mills, and he proposed a "multi-influence hypothesis" instead. He contended that Mills' presentation of the relation between the economic elite and the political process was oversimplified, and that his power elite concept of American society was, on the whole, a bad caricature. In The Power Structure, Rose undertook a comprehensive critique of Mills' Power Elite and of Floyd Hunter's Community Power Structure, which tended to back up Mills' concepts with statistical data.¹⁰

Among Mills' radical critics were Robert Lynd, Paul Sweezy, and Herbert Aptheker. These critics applauded The Power Elite, but they were Marxist oriented and thought Mills did not go far enough in his attack on American society. They did not like Mills' rejection of a class concept for an elitist one. In The World of C. Wright Mills, Aptheker voiced three main areas of disagreement: Mills' concept of the power elite as all-powerful, and the masses of people generally powerless; Mills' offer of a triangular power

¹⁰ Floyd Hunter, Community Power Structure (Chapel Hill, 1953).

elite in preference to that of a ruling class; and his tendency to identify the characteristics of the American people with that of the elite.¹¹ Aptheker believed that the masses have more power than Mills suggested, even though it is not always expressed in definitive action. He thought that the majority of Americans are not necessarily corrupted by the immorality of the elite, but are basically hard-working, moral individuals. He also contended that Mills' analysis would have been more complete if he had taken into deeper consideration the reality of poverty and relative incomes, intra-class differences and conflicts, and the role of blacks in American history.

"Highbrow" critics were more concerned with The Power Elite as an event than as a theory. They included Philip Rieff, Richard Rovere, and Daniel Bell. Mills described these critics as standing outside the book, men who were more concerned with its effect than with its truth content.

Mills' description of the unequal distribution of power among the masses and the elite of American society, was probably the most discussed aspect of his theories; but he was not satisfied with merely describing

11 Herbert Aptheker, The World of C. Wright Mills (New York, 1960), pp. 19-37.

or exposing the facts as he saw them. He also tried to analyse what he thought was the source of the problem, and he suggested a prescription. One of the major problems, Mills thought, was related to the fact that there seemed to be no set of moral beliefs or worthwhile code of values to which the society could respond. In fact, he thought certain aspects of the "higher immorality" had been institutionalized and had far-reaching structural effects.¹² The general acceptance of prevalent white collar crime, political corruption, and the hedonistic lifestyle of Americans was part of the higher immorality. The problems of the present Nixon administration--the surreptitious handling of large sums of money, Nixon's acquisition of various mansions, Agnew's cavorting with celebrities and acceptance of pay-offs, the initial general acceptance of the Watergate affair by a major part of the population--would be considered by Mills to be part of the higher immorality. If he were alive, he would no doubt derive great satisfaction from pointing out to his critics these and many other recent examples which so aptly support sections of his power elite thesis. These problems were, he asserted, part of the fact that older values and codes of uprightness were fading away. He said:

¹² See Chapter 15 in The Power Elite for a description of the "higher immorality."

The moral uneasiness of our time results from the fact that older values and codes of uprightness no longer grip the men and women of the corporate era, nor have they been replaced by new values and codes which would lend moral meaning and sanction to the corporate routines they must now follow. It is not that the mass public has explicitly rejected received codes; it is rather that to many of the members, these ideas have become hollow (The Power Elite, p. 344).

This lack of direction, this moral confusion, Mills blamed on the lack of a well-defined ideology, or worse, the "end of ideology" ideology.

Ideology

Mills defined an ideology as a "statement of ideals, a designation of agencies, and as a set of social theories" (The Marxist, p. 13). He equates an ideology with a political philosophy which justifies certain institutions and practices and attacks others. It tells us how to find out where we are going, and where we stand. Mannheim made a distinction between ideologies: those ideas which defended the existing social order, he called "ideological," and those that sought to change the society, he called "Utopian."¹³ The ideology Mills believed American society needed was of the Utopian type.

¹³ Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia, Chapter IV, on "The Utopian Mentality."

Mills, like Mannheim, believed that every age has a political philosophy and ideology; and that if there were none clearly defined, it was the task of the intellectual to create one. For this reason, Mills objected to the end of ideology doctrine. Daniel Bell wrote, in The End of Ideology, that the old ideologies had lost their "truth" and power to persuade for the radical intelligentsia. "What gave the ideologies their force," he said, "was its passion"; and they had lost this through "abstract philosophical inquiry, which has always sought to eliminate passions and encourage the person to rationalize all ideas" (End of Ideology, p. 400). In Bell's opinion, there was a rough consensus in the Western world among intellectuals on political issues; there was, therefore, no need for ideologies. Such as there were, were mainly among rising states in Asia and Africa; and the main impulses of these ideologies were economic development and national power.

This end of ideology, for Mills, was an ideology in itself. But in his opinion, it was not a clarification of the issues. He realized that the common ideologies of liberalism, conservatism, and Marxism had become hollow and overworked; but instead of hailing the end, he contended that the intellectual should

either create new ideologies cast around the values of reason and freedom, or else rejuvenate, reform, and reinterpret the good points of the old ideologies.

Instead of setting up ideological guidelines for people to follow, Mills thought the intellectuals were engaged in what he called the "great American celebration," with its conservative mood and pluralistic structuralist rhetoric.¹⁴ By this, he was referring to the ideas of various balance theories which saw a society in which authority was at a minimum because it was guided by the autonomous, self-regulating forces of the market. They were all middle-level theories put forth by middle-level people (university professor, for example), with middle-level justifications, that is, intellectual vocabularies of motives.¹⁵ He argued with people who saw nothing but an idyllic United States; he thus refuted the theories of Louis Hartz, who saw only a "middle class." He disagreed also with the idea of an "income revolution" put forward by Simon Kuznets and Arthur E. Burns, as well as Galbraith's theory of "countervailing power,"

¹⁴ The Power Elite, pp. 325-342; Power, Politics, and Power, pp. 208-220. Specific examples he used were Jacques Barzun's, God's Country and Mine (Boston, 1954), and Daniel Boorstin, The Genius of American Politics (Chicago, 1953).

¹⁵ In his power pyramid in Power Elite, Mills placed professors in the middle levels of power.

A.A. Berle's "corporate conscious," and various "harmony of interest" schools (Aptheker, 1960, pp. 12-14).

Although the mood of the United States was conservative, Mills did not perceive a well-defined conservative ideology. He defined conservatism as traditionalism become self-conscious, elaborated, and forensic.¹⁶ It usually involved a noble aristocracy, a peasantry, and a petty-bourgeoisie with guild inheritance. There was no stratum or group within the American population that would correspond to these factors; he therefore thought that there were no traditions to which conservatism would appeal.

Liberalism, as the prevailing and official political philosophy of American society, was also seen by Mills as being inadequate.¹⁷ He wrote,

As a kind of political rhetoric, liberalism has been banalized; now it is commonly used by everyone who talks in public for every divergent and contradicting purpose...What this means is that liberalism as a common denominator of American political rhetoric is without coherent content; that in the process of its banalization, its goals have been formalized as to provide no

¹⁶ C.W. Mills, "The Conservative Mood," in Dissent, Vol. I, 1 (Winter, 1954), pp. 23-31; also in Power, Politics, and People, pp. 208-220.

¹⁷ C.W. Mills, "Liberal Values in the Modern World: The Relevance of 19th Century Liberalism Today," Anvil and Student Partisan (Winter, 1952), pp. 4-7; also Power, Politics, and People, pp. 187-195.

clear moral optic (Power, Politics, and People, p. 189).

Classic liberalism as a political philosophy, however, was viewed by him as assuming freedom and security as its key values. It was a humanistic doctrine, stressing the value of individual personality. Man was seen as the measure of all things, events, institutions, policies and societies were judged in terms of their effects on the individual human being. This kind of ideology flourished best in a capitalistic country of small entrepreneurs and free enterprise. But as the country changed from one of small business and independent entrepreneurs to one of corporate giants and monopoly capitalism, classic liberalism lost its potency.

Mills thought classic liberalism was a desirable ideology; but as a pluralist, he believed the classic liberal must come to grips with socialism and its importance to the modern world. Within socialism were many of the liberal concepts that Mills believed in, and it was only by entering into a dialogue with the Marxist (something he thought American intellectuals neglected), he asserted, that the liberal would be able to clarify his position and be relevant to the modern world.

What were Mills' hopes for American society?

Could it be saved from the ideological malaise and the corruption of the power elite which he saw threatening it?

Intellectuals and Labour

At one point earlier in his career, Mills placed much hope in the power of labour leaders to act as a counterweight to the power elite, and he called them the new men of power. He later dismissed this as "labour metaphysics" when he observed that labour leaders progressed to the middle levels of power and lost sight of their original purpose. In 1952, in the article, "Liberal Values in the Modern World," he wrote,

Whatever the political promises of labor and leftward forces fifteen years ago, they have not been fulfilled; whatever leadership they have developed has hidden itself for illusory safety, or been buried by events it neither understands nor wishes to control. Organized labor in the Forties and early Fifties has been mainly another adaptive and adapting element (Power, Politics, and People, p. 187).

Mills then turned to the intelligentsia whom he had always seen as performing an important role in creating a radical movement. At one time, he had envisioned the intellectuals as forming alliances with the labour movement and the middle class, an alliance supposedly operating in Quebec at the moment; he saw them creating

a new ideology around which the labour unions could coalesce.¹⁸ To be effective politically, he insisted, these two groups must form an alliance, but as he lost hope in organized labour, he attributed an independent role to the intellectuals.

He did not believe that political involvement for the intellectuals would be effective. That is, he did not think the intellectual had to join a party or engage in organized politics. He himself is not known to have voted in any elections (The New Sociology, p. 83). Political criticism was seen as the intellectual role; he called not for a program but an attitude. Towards the end of his life, he was probably aware that his generation of intellectuals would not perform this function. In The Causes of World War III, he thought about the possibility of an intellectual community replacing the power elite, but did not see much hope of this as he became convinced that "N.A.T.O. intellectuals" and "crackpot realists"¹⁹ in the American intellectual ranks were serving the interests

¹⁸ S.H. Milner and H. Milner, The Decolonization of Quebec (Toronto, 1973) for a discussion of the radical labour movement in Quebec.

¹⁹ The crackpot realists were men who were constantly engaged in the preparation of war. They were rigidly focused on scattered, nebulous fears of the enemy and the next step. For a more detailed explanation see C.W. Mills, The Causes of World War III, Chapter 13.

of the power elite. He never gave up, however, his belief in the power of the intellect and reason. In 1960, therefore, we found him turning to the younger, more radical intellectuals, urging them to take up the tools for radical changes.²⁰ This is the group which later became known as the New Left.

Analytical Approach

In examining Mills' approach to the structure of power in American society, we find that his analytical method was not really novel, and that during his career, he fluctuated from one style of analysis to another.²¹ The numerous responses he received to his concept of the power elite, then, were not so much a response to novelty as it was to the fact that he described a perspective of American society that was contrary to the popular balance theories which prevailed at the time.

²⁰ C.W. Mills, "Letter to the New Left," New Left Review, 5 (September-October, 1960), pp. 18-23; later reprinted as, "On the Left," Studies on the Left, Vol. 11, 1 (1961), pp. 63-72. See also, "The Decline of the Left," The Listener, Vol LXI, 1566 (April 2, 1959); Contact, 3 (1959), pp. 5-18. Also, William F. Warde, "Who Will Change the World: The New Left and the Views of C. Wright Mills," International Socialist Review, Vol. 22, 3 (Summer, 1961).

²¹ In an interview with Gillam, Kenneth Stamp said that Mills' "ideas about the war, the world, and American society differed only in detail from his own and Richard Hofstadter" (Gillam, 1966, p. 85).

Although Mills is best known for his analysis of power in terms of "elite" and "masses" he did not always favour the approach. In his early political writings, he showed preference for a structural approach dealing with power in terms of classes rather than masses or elites. One such paper was "A Marx for the Manager,"²² This article was his first overtly political writing, a response to James Burnham's book, The Managerial Revolution: What is Happening to the World.²³ Burnham's thesis was that society would tend to become more managerial rather than socialist or capitalist, because of increased rationalization. Through this rationalization, the society would have more need for "productive experts" and "administrative executives" who eventually would come to dominate the society. Mills argued that Burnham saw the society too much in terms of masses and elites, and that he did not adequately take into account the functioning of class structures.

We find later that Mills appropriated this very

22 C.W. Mills, in Ethics: An International Journal of Legal, Political, and Social Thought, Vol. 52, 2 (January, 1942), pp. 200-215; also in Power, Politics, and People, pp. 53-71.

22 James Burnham, The Managerial Revolution (New York, 1941), pp. 71-76.

analysis which he had rejected. He, like Marx, had also once seen the working class (new men of power) as the pivot for social change, but he gave up the idea fairly soon, after he came to believe that labour leaders had been coopted into the middle levels of power.

There was a striking similarity between Mills' power analysis and one developed earlier by Franz Neuman.²⁴ In his book, Neuman perceived four power elites in German society, but Mills simplified this to three and applied them to American society.²⁵ Apparently Mills did not think that Hitler's Germany was so much different from Roosevelt's America: there were structural trends in Germany, he said, which were parallel to those in the United States.

Coming towards the end of his life, Mills' political writings took on a less analytical sociological style and tended towards a more literary one dealing with international subjects rather than just national ones. He developed what he himself called a kind of

²⁴ Franz Neuman, Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933-1944 (New York, 1944). See also Mills' review of the book, "Locating the Enemy; The Nazi Behemoth Dissected," Partisan Review, Vol. 4 (September-October, 1942), pp. 432-437.

²⁵ Neuman saw power in Germany deposited in: the individual sector; the Nazi party; the state bureaucracy; and the armed forces.

high-level "pamphleteering" (Wakefield, 1971, p. 65). Listen Yankee was a book of such an order. In it he tried to present the viewpoint of the Cuban revolutionary. He himself supported the revolution, and tried to point out to the United States that the policy it held towards Cuba was ignorant and hysterical. The book was hailed by many and condemned by others for not being sociological or accurate; but at this point, Mills was more interested in reaching a bigger audience than in turning out a sociologically precise work.

The final years of Mills' life revolved around the problem of possibility of total destruction through atomic warfare. From this concern originated his book, The Causes of World War III. Mills envisioned a world heading towards another world war, with the blame resting not only on the irresponsible military, industrial, and political complex, but also on the intellectuals who had either withdrawn from political life, supported the elites, or used a liberal rhetoric to cover up conservative default. As part of his program to prevent a war, he set up certain guidelines in Chapter Fifteen of the book; among them are;

1. All private profit to be taken out of the preparation of war;
2. recognition of China;

3. recognition of the Oder-Neisse line as marking the eastern extremity of Germany;
4. termination of N.A.T.O. and the Warsaw Pact;
5. acceptance of a proposal for an arms embargo in the Mid-East;
6. all foreign troops belonging to all powers, wherever stationed, to be withdrawn;
7. all testing of nuclear weapons to cease;
8. all production of "extermination" weapons to be terminated;
9. all security tests and oaths of loyalty to be ended by the United States;
10. a call to all intellectuals to become conscientious objectors, and for Western intellectuals to make their own peace with intellectuals in the socialist world.

When Mills died, one of his unfinished projects was an imaginary dialogue between an American and a Russian intellectual, called, "Contacting the Enemy" (Wakefield, 1971, p. 71). He had also hoped to write a book on the intellectuals which would propose and hope to create the "New Left." His major project was to be a massive "World Sociology" (Wakefield, 1971, p. 71), a type of comparative sociology.

To the very end, Mills never gave up his belief in the intellect, reason, and the power of ideas. He

looked to various directions for a group to lead the world to rationality and freedom, but his final hope rested in the men of reason, the intellectuals. They, he believed, were to be guided by the moral precepts and the framework of liberalism and Marxism. Marxism became an increasingly attractive alternative for him, but he could not accept it "lock, stock, and barrel." He saw it as a very important and useful model rather than as a theory which was to be confirmed or refuted. It was a moral set of guidelines rather than a dogmatic set of laws.

From Mills' vantage point, the world was in a shambles, directed towards a world war by an irresponsible elite, an anomic public, and an uncommitted intellectual community. The only vestige of hope rested in the young intellectuals who were to be guided by a revised form of Marxian and liberal ideology, and who were to create the New Left.

Political and Social Position

From the preceding analysis of Mills' biographical, intellectual and political development, could we locate him socially and politically? He was a complex personality who consciously avoided labels and categories. It would, therefore, be an insult to his memory to try to label him neatly. To facilitate our analysis

and to place him in a clearer perspective, however, we may for a moment assign him to different social and political categories.

At one time or other, Mills had been called a Populist, Marxist, Revisionist, Pragmatist, Progressive, individualist, radical, Manichean, Machiavellian, Trotskyite, and a marginal man.²⁶

Mills may have been a little of each, but no one of them adequately described even his general characteristics. It is obvious, for example, that he was politically towards the left, but it is difficult to say where exactly along the continuum he was located.

Although Dowd referred to him as a democrat,²⁷ as far as is known, he did not vote and did not believe in the American political system, and certainly not in the American "two-party" system. He had this to say about the intellectual and organized parties:

If he states public issues as he sees them, he cannot take seriously the slogans and confusions used by parties with a chance to win power. He therefore feels politically irrelevant. Yet if he approached public issues realistically, that is, in terms of the major parties, he has already compromised their very statement so, that he is not able to sustain an enthusiasm for political action and thought (Power,

26 See Sociology and Pragmatism, p. 12.

27 Dowd, in The New Sociology, p. 12.

Politics, and People, p. 292).²⁸

Progressive

Mills' alternative to the present party system was a system of multiple parties representing all of the individual interests of the people, and a return to a "grass roots" democracy. This attitude has led to the suggestion that he was in fact more "progressive" than radical,²⁹ for he would have preferred to elect a new President and new Representatives rather than to purge the old ones. This hope, it was said, was similar to the progressives' and old Populists' notion of democracy, and his call for a multiple party system was reminiscent of America's earlier "age of reform."³⁰ The progressive reformer, like Mills, believed that facts must be exposed and the people morally exhorted before they are moved to action. Apparently the muckraker was a prominent figure for the reformer, and Mills often considered himself one. Common also to Mills and the progressives was an implicit belief in

28 Also, C.W. Mills, "Probing the Two-Party State," review of W.E. Binkley's American Political Parties in The New Leader (October 30, 1943), p. 3.

29 R.A. Gillam, op. cit., p. 99; Paul Goodman, "Reply," to "The Barricade and the Bedroom," Politics (October, 1945), p. 316.

30 R. Hofstadter, The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R. (New York, 1955).

the goodness of man.

Populism

Another strain of political thought which Mills is frequently associated with is Populism. Populism, however, dealt more with an attitude than with a definitive philosophy or clearly outlined set of principles.³¹ It was mainly a preservatist thought common among small farmers in the middle west, who believed that their life was being threatened by larger corporate forces in the East. What they argued for was a return to perfect competition of small businesses and independent entrepreneurs. It was in effect a strange mixture of radicalism and conservatism, in that the solutions they prescribed for their problems could very well have disrupted the existing capitalist economy; but at the same time, they wanted a return to an earlier, more simplistic era of capitalism.

The tone of Mills' writings often suggested similar sentiments and attitudes. He was against the irresponsibility and unaccountability of large corporations, and admired the small businessmen of a past era. Gillam elaborates on Mills' attitude:

31 N. Pollack, The Populist Mind (New York, 1967).

To be sure, he always retained something of the populist morality: his quick temper and violent resentments, his tendency to cast questions in terms of moral absolutes, his frustrated search for political power, and his sense of victimization by forces which often seemed suspiciously associated with industrialization and corporate growth (Gillam, 1966, p. 34).³²

Mills' desire to return to an earlier age was not to be confused with a return to a pre-industrial, rural society. He loved the material things new technological advances produced, but he was against shabby goods and the impersonality and irresponsibility of the modern large business. His ideal was a return to that independent life when each man through his own rationality was free to determine his work and being. Co-existing with these conservative tendencies were very definite radical elements, radical for his time.

³² See Mills' description of the small entrepreneur in the first chapter of White Collar, as well as articles dealing with the theme of freedom and security, and the small entrepreneur and small businesses, in "Collectivism and 'The Mix-Up Economy'," in Power, Politics, and People, pp. 179-186, and "The Competitive Personality," ibid., pp. 263-273.

In 1945, Mills conducted a study with Melville J. Ulmer, published under the title, Small Businesses and Civic Welfare, Report of the Special 79th Congress, 2nd session, No. 135 (Washington, 1946). His interpretation of data suggested that big businesses tended to depress civic welfare, while small businesses tend to raise it. However, Irving Fowler conducted a similar study which reversed the findings. See I. Fowler, "Local Industrial Structures, Economic Power and Community Welfare," Social Problems, 6 (Summer, 1958), pp. 41-51.

Radical

Miliband described Mills as a not very dormant anarchist, who was anti-elitist, anti-bureaucratic, and anti-state (The New Sociology, p. 82). His anti-authoritarianism and opposition to other imposed rules and regulations were also well known, for Mills made it a point to make clear his feelings:

I do not like nations. They are all part of the official and the abstract, and in the end, of the petty and the destructive. What they want to do is organize me, for war or for peace, for this or for that...if any human organization, including that of any state, wants my loyalty, let the men who are running it behave themselves with intelligence and a little human dignity. Let one or two governments start being loyal to what I stand for, and then we'll talk again about loyalty in general (Gillam, 1966, p. 109).

He was also described as being anti-institutional and anti-traditional by Gillam, who quoted a letter Mills once wrote to a fraternity (Phi Beta Kappa) that elected him to its membership for excellent academic performance. The letter rejected the membership on the grounds that the fraternity had no "functional justification" and served primarily as an "ostentatious display of things already done."³³

³³ The full text of the letter is contained in Gillam's thesis. See also Miliband, *op. cit.*, for further expression of Mills' anti-traditionalism.

Mills' radicalism, however, is for the most part based on his political views, his trenchant and bitter criticisms of American society, and on his opposition to almost everything in American life. He may have seemed exceedingly anti-American, and there was much in America he did not like; but he did not transfer his affections to any other nation, nor did he adopt any other country.³⁴ Mills' radicalism is described by Warner as a form of "indigenous North American radicalism." It was distinct from other radicalism in that it was not formulated abroad and transported to America, as has been the usual case, with Marxism for example. This North American radicalism was perceived by Warner³⁵ as a synthesis of European Marxism, indigenous Populism, and American Pragmatism.

Marxism and Revisionism

It is well known that Mills approached socialist

³⁴ Mills disliked both the political system and the goods produced in America. For example, a fellow professor had complimented him on a motorcycle cap he had, and had asked him where he got it. Mills replied, "Not in this country." He was also very fond of German motors. See Wakefield's article, p. 71.

³⁵ John Anson Warner, "The Critics of C. Wright Mills: An Analysis of the Varieties of Critical Theory," an unpublished study read at the annual meeting of the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association of the Learned Societies, 1972. Warner is at the University of Saskatchewan.

thought in later life, but he was never a radical Marxist of the European variety.³⁶ He would, however, have considered himself a plain Marxist. They are those who work in Marx's tradition, he contended, and agree that his (Marx's) model and way of thinking are important and central to their own intellectual history. They also stress the humanism of Marxism and the role of the superstructure in history.³⁷

As a plain Marxist, Mills did not accept many Marxian propositions such as dialectical laws, substructure determinism, and the role of the proletariat in overthrowing society. His reluctance to accept orthodox Marxism is sometimes considered a form of revisionism, and led Pablo Gonzales to comment:

Marxism represented for him a more and more attractive alternative the more closely he approached forbidden areas, but his need to reject anything that was official brought him, as it had earlier in Cuba, to an attitude verging on revisionism and the European third force, an attitude that never

36 Marxism has never been a prominent thought among American intellectuals, possibly because it is associated with socialism and Russian Communism, which are highly charged concepts in American society. It is, however, a growing movement, with Paul Sweezy, Ralph Miliband, Ernest Mandel, Leo Huberman, and others among its exponents. Many socialist thinkers are identifiable in the socialist journal, Monthly Review, of which Paul Sweezy is a founder.

37 See The Marxist, p. 99, for a description of plain Marxist.

left him. He moved into a position of the New Left, that position which has its base in the "third world" in which the conceptions and categories of Marxism undergo practical revision, designed to strip it of dogma and slogans and allow it to promote effectively revolution in the hungry countries of the world.³⁸

It was probably this same rejection of the official and his desire for individualism and independence that prevented Mills from seeing that the days of perfect competition and small independent entrepreneurs could not exist for long, given the precepts of capitalist ideology. He could probably have accepted the Utopian communist society of Marx, where every man is free, but modern socialist societies where individualism is negated would have been difficult for him to condone.

Each individual throughout his life belongs to several groups, but each person, and especially a politically active man, can generally be associated with one group more than another. According to reference group theory, individuals need groups in which to ground their reality, and they need specific groups in order to achieve a sense of identity and alleviate the psychological discomfort that isolation creates. Mills, it is safe to say, never experienced the smugness that

³⁸ Pablo Gonzales Casanova, "C. Wright Mills: An American Conscience," in The New Sociology, p. 70.

results from fraternity, although his isolation was not complete and was in part self-imposed. Thus, he said:

I have never known what others call "fraternity" with any group...neither academic or political. With a few individuals, yes, but with groups however small, no (Gillam, 1966, p. 53).

This attitude led others to label him a marginal man who never became part of any establishment.³⁹ Mills was no doubt affected by his isolation, thus becoming, as Dowd said, an intemperate, combative, and somewhat warped man, towards the end of his career (The New Sociology, p. 58).

Intelligentsia and Independent Radicals

Given the general characteristics of Mills, he could probably be classified as a member of a group of independent radicals of his time.⁴⁰ According to

³⁹ See Warner, pp. 11-12. Robert E. Parks originated the term "marginal man" in Race and Culture. The marginal man lives in two worlds. Warner describes Mills as a brilliant, cultured individual who was at the same time a rough-hew, insecure person. He belonged to the world of the polished Columbia professor but never became part of the academic establishment.

⁴⁰ See Ruth Harper Mills, "The Fascinated Readers: Analysis of the Politics Questionnaire." Mills and his wife found that a high majority of the readers of Politics magazine, as well as the contributors, were independent radicals like Mills himself, who were opposed to war and were politically and intellectually independent.

how groups are defined in society, they would not fit into that classification; they had no specific community of interest as such. They were, however, all politically and intellectually independent, were opposed to war, and were ready for radical changes in American society. These characteristics were, as we have seen, also those of Mills, and many who belonged to this amorphous group were indeed his friends and acquaintances--Hofstadter, Stamp, Gerth, Friedel. This group and others who qualified for this category fit well into Mannheim's conceptualization of that class of socially unattached individuals referred to as the intelligentsia.

The only common but fairly strong bond the intelligentsia had was a similar educational heritage. Inherent in this shared heritage were probably Mills' cherished values of freedom, reason, and truth. These values could be considered unique to this group in the sense that they became a conscious and constant attitude towards the world; they are also most often the central focus of the group's work. The average individual, on the other hand, rarely evaluates, at least consciously, his life and society in terms of these values.

Though Mills harboured a high regard for intellectuals, and undoubtedly considered himself a member

of that community, his vision of the intellectual life was probably somewhat more austere and idealistic than most others were willing to accept. Although he saw the intellectuals as a distinct group who should have no specific ties to interest groups in the society, neither did he expect them to form into an ivory-towered clique, remote from the general public. Nor did he expect them to be floating, disorganized, a characterless mass. Mannheim's concept indicates that traditionally the unattached intellectual has either affiliated himself with a class or scrutinized his own social moorings and tried to fulfil the intellectual interests of the whole (Ideology and Utopia, p. 158). Mills advocated the latter, but his sense of commitment and his strong need for independence seemed to have been in conflict. He wished to be unattached, but he also sympathized deeply with the powerless, the working class, and the Third World peoples.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this thesis, its purpose was stated as an attempt to understand the relationship between the forces that shaped Mills' vision and his ideas about American society. This in effect suggested a sociology of knowledge perspective, one which is concerned with the social origins of thought and ideas, and stresses the interrelationship between the individual's conceptions and his sociocultural background. The writer also hoped to highlight those important contributions Mills may have made to his society or to the discipline of sociology.

In order to do this, biographical data were examined in an effort to understand his personality and the factors that may have contributed to his character, to the type of person he became. The writer tried to sketch an intellectual and political profile, to see what ideas he came to hold, and the type of discussions which took place between him and the intellectual and political public with which he had discourse. There was, finally, an attempt to demonstrate the relationship between these three factors, the biographical, the political, and the intellectual, and how the tone of

his discussions may have been tempered by personal characteristics, which were in turn shaped by socio-cultural influences.

In summarizing briefly, we remember that in childhood Mills was an isolated, lonely child who was unable to form long-lasting relationships with peers, partly because of the mobility of his family. He developed problems in school, being rejected and teased by his classmates, and in turn rejecting them. He withdrew, spending much of his time with the female members of the household, or reading; in this setting, his sensitive but strong-willed and defiant attitude developed. In adolescence, he also had problems with peers and school. Gradually, he came to have a sense of being different, but eventually learned to use this to gain self-confidence. He continued to spend long hours in isolation, reading and working on various projects. He became a rebel, rejecting certain "normal" activities of his time, and exhibiting a competitive and combative attitude even among friends. His will became stronger; he tried to control most situations in which he was involved, rejecting those over which he had no control. At this stage, Mills was immersed in intellectual matters, and tried to rationalize and socialize many of the attitudes he held. The isolation and rejection he had endured became desirable qualities which

he felt were related to his independence and freedom. Freedom was thus universalized and made into a moral value, something for which he had much support from the literature he read. In later adulthood, these values were broadened and sharpened even more: they became social and political concerns. His need for independence and freedom led him to a concern with power and its distribution in American society. He came to believe that the United States had come to be a relatively powerless, white collar society ruled by an economic, political, and military elite which was primarily concerned with achieving its own personal gains. These were the forces, he believed, that threatened his own freedom. But if they threatened his freedom, it stood to reason that they threatened the masses as well. It was thus imperative that every man be aware that his own values were ultimately tied up with public issues. The belief that personal values and public issues intersect came about from the recognition of the role his own personal troubles and values had in motivating his theories. Related to this same concept, Mills developed the idea that individuals could not transcend their private values, they could not separate

personal values from public ideals; those who claim, in the name of scientific objectivity, to be capable of this were engaged in deception, self- or otherwise. He decided it was better instead to recognize these values, the sources of one's motivation, and make them public. This in effect is what he did.

Mills, as it were, developed his own vocabulary of motives, with its main vocabulary centred around such concepts as reason, freedom, truth, power, and the interaction of personal biography and history, private troubles and public issues. It was a similar vocabulary to that of the intelligentsia or independent radicals, and the classic theorists such as Veblen, Weber, Marx, and Mannheim. Some of the ideas he acquired may have occurred through the process of elective affinity, whereby they were consistent and agreeable with attitudes he already had, however uncrytallized.

Through a set of unique contingencies in the environment, Mills came to place independence very highly in his hierarchy of values. He held this value so highly even at a time when most Americans were greatly concerned with group solidarity and identity, that he was willing to cast about for new and radical ideas when the rest of the intellectual community was either content with theories already in existence, or

else were celebrating the United States.¹ At the time Mills wrote, his theories were hotly debated--and are yet today--as to their accuracy. But it could be generally agreed that there was much truth to what he said--which is probably what made his theories so appealing--and that he made significant contributions to sociology.

To the sociology of knowledge, he contributed the key notion of vocabularies of motives, thus eliminating motives as a totally individualistic concept, and giving it a social quality as well. In this scheme, motives were seen as justifications for one's acts and as strategies of action. When they appeal to others, they very often become ideology or rhetoric. Implied also in the vocabulary of motives thesis was a theory for signs and symbols whereby we could locate individuals and groups socially and politically by close examination of the language and symbols they use.

Another worthwhile contribution Mills made was his attempt to clarify values as problems, to show how personal values are related to larger social problems;

¹ During Mills' years, America went through a series of crises--the Depression, a World War, the Korean War. It has been said that celebration of the country became a national past-time; national figures and everyday citizens boast of being "Number One."

and how these values can be used as societal solutions when cast in an ideological framework, whether communist, utopian, liberal, and so on.

In addition, Mills developed a valid form of cultural analysis--in the classical style of Veblen, Mosca, and Weber--with his observations on industrial, political, and military elite, and his concern with bureaucracy and the vertical arrangement of power in American society.

In trying to highlight the contributions Mills made to sociology, and to understand the interrelations between Mills' ideas and his sociocultural setting from a sociology of knowledge perspective, it is hoped that this thesis may also contribute to an understanding of radical political figures and the role they play in social change.²

² See Kenneth Keniston, Young Radicals: Notes on Committed Youth (New York, 1968). Keniston studied the personality and background of young New Left radicals, and they were found to possess common qualities: an independent questioning attitude, orientation towards principle, early sense of being special or different, and a high academic performance. These were similar to many that Mills possessed. See also Everett E. Hagen, On the Theory of Social Change (Illinois, 1962) for an analysis of personality and historical factors in the process of social change.

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